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Mars Disarmed

A Play in Four Acts

Mars Disarmed

A PLAY
In Four Acts

BY R. CUNNINGHURST

SAN FRANCISCO
The Whitaker and Ray Company
(Incorporated)
1901

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THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY.

General Vimont, *in the service of the Emperor Napoleon.*
Alixe, *his sister.*
Count de Birson, *secretary to Vimont and preceptor to Alixe.*
Marquis de Mirvoisin, *nephew of Birson's.*
Fresney.
Sellier.
Madeleine de Marot.
Madame de la Marthe.
Mademoiselle de la Marthe.
Audré, *an Orderly.*
The Mayor of Marcy.
The Abbot of Narmontier.
An Old Farmer, Bosquet, Vignier, } *Tenants of Vimont.*
Latour, Chartier, Meaupert, Beaumont, } *Seconds.*
Armand, Edmond, } *Servants.*
Gaston, *a Page.*
Clement, *an Agent of the Police.*
A Gardener.
Guests, Farmers, Tenants, Etc.

PERIOD

A.D. 1807. The Year of the Battle of Friedland

The Scene in the First, Second, and Third Acts takes place in the Château of the Vimonts. The Scene in the Fourth Act takes place in the adjoining Château of the Marquis de Mirvoisin.

The Action takes place in Four successive Days

THE FIRST ACT

THE RETURN FROM FRIEDLAND

THE SECOND ACT

THE DESCRIPTION OF FRIEDLAND

THE THIRD ACT

THE CHALLENGE

THE FOURTH ACT

THE DUEL

MARS DISARMED.

THE FIRST ACT.

THE RETURN FROM FRIEDLAND.

Time: Afternoon.

Library, richly furnished. To the right, long table covered with books, documents, rolls of paper, etc. In a prominent place, opposite table, an antique arm-chair with high back. In a corner, a page sleeps. BIRSON *(a man of forty; shoulders slightly suggestive of those of a hunchback; light mustache, waxed upwards; slow of speech; dressed in black, style Louis XVI.; fastidiously neat; obviously vain; dignified and serious in the presence of others; frivolous and theatrical when alone) is seated at the table, reading and correcting a MS. Occasionally he reads a passage aloud; runs his pen through a line; alters a paragraph; nods approvingly, or shakes his head in disapproval.*

BIRSON.

[*Reading aloud.*] "But mortals, for being austere, are none the less mortal" . . . That sounds

well . . . [*Reads to himself; corrects; then aloud.*] "The Princess grew more restless—like a bird, long caged, sighing for the fields and forests" . . . Exquisitely poetic. [*Reads to himself; then aloud.*] "What, O Princess, would you think of the slave who dared to look longingly in the eyes of his mistress?" . . . That is to the point—very much to the point . . . [*Looks at clock and calls page.*] Gaston! [*No response.*] Gaston! [*No response. He waits a second and calls louder.*] Gaston! [*Still receiving no response, he turns slowly in his chair and sees the page asleep. Approaching, he takes him by the ear and raises him from the seat. Page awakens with frightened look.*] What pranks were you up to last night, that you need slumber in broad daylight? Take a book and sit in the ante-chamber. I'll call you when I need you; and be careful not to come till I call you. [*Page goes out, rubbing his eyes.* Birson *goes to the table, takes the MS. in hand and arranges the sheets carefully.*] Yes—this may reveal to her my sentiments; failing which, it may facilitate my declaring them . . . Delicate conception! . . . Admirable plan! . . . I wonder how it will sound when it falls upon her ears . . . [*He reads.*] "On the wooded banks of the Arno, not far from the ancient city of Florence . . ." No—let the picture be complete in my mind, that I may better grasp the rôle I am to play . . . [*He advances to the door, bows low to an imaginary lady, offers her his hand, and escorts her to the old-fashioned arm-chair with high back; he bows low again and withdraws to a point at end of table,*

where he takes position to read. After looking earnestly in the direction of the arm-chair, he reads the MS. aloud.] "On the wooded banks of the Arno, not far from the ancient city of Florence, stood a palace, surrounded by a vast domain. Here, attended by her maids, lived the Princess Amarinta—now in her sixteenth year—the sole survivor of the princely house of Borimenti. The last worldly act of her father was to confide her to the care of Luigi, his faithful secretary, a man of noble birth but shattered fortune . . .

[*Page enters.*]

PAGE.

Monsieur de la Marsignerie sends to inquire whether there is news of Colonel Vimont.

BIRSON.

Tell the messenger to convey to Monsieur de la Marsignerie my regrets at having to inform him that, up to the present moment, there is no news of the Colonel. [*Page goes out.* BIRSON *mutters to himself.*] I am bothered all day long with inquiries as to whether there is news of the Colonel —as to whether there is any prospect of hearing from the Colonel—as to when I expect the Colonel to return . . . The Colonel will never return—alive. [*He resumes his attitude and reads the MS.*] "On the wooded banks of the Arno . . ." [*A servant enters.* BIRSON *looks annoyed.*] What do you wish?

SERVANT.

[*Obsequiously.*] I wish to know whether Monsieur has any orders for me.

BIRSON.

None—or I should have sent for you. [*Servant is about to withdraw, when* BIRSON *recalls him.*] Armand! . . . on reflection, I have something to tell you.

SERVANT.

[*Obsequiously*] At your service, Monsieur.

BIRSON.

I hear you have been speaking of me.

SERVANT.

Ah, Monsieur, I know I have enemies.

BIRSON.

None worse than yourself. To speak disparagingly of your superiors is not incumbent on you.

SERVANT.

Disparagingly, Monsieur—oh, I beg your pardon.

BIRSON.

Excuses are useless. I know whereof I speak.

SERVANT.

At least Monsieur might tell me what I said.

BIRSON.

Need I tell you that which you already know?

SERVANT.

Ah, pardon, Monsieur. I know nothing.

BIRSON.

Well, then, listen to your own words: Monsieur de Birson—that is myself—assumes a great deal in trying to control this establishment. Monsieur de Birson—that is myself—affects a great many airs. Monsieur de Birson—that is myself—thinks that because he is connected with the nobility of a régime that is no more, he is a superior person, whereas he is but a paid hireling of Colonel Vimont, like Monsieur Armand—that is yourself.

SERVANT.

Ah, pardon, Monsieur. I never uttered such sentiments.

BIRSON.

Not only you lied when you spoke thus, but you lie now, when you deny having spoken thus. I wish you to understand that if I assume to control this establishment, it is because I have been commissioned to do so by Colonel Vimont;

and in virtue of the power vested in me by him, I dismiss you from his service.

SERVANT.

Dismissed! Is this the reward of faithful service to my master—the Colonel?

BIRSON.

It is the reward of faithful service to your master—Falsehood.

SERVANT.

I am to go, then, Monsieur?

BIRSON.

You are to leave this house within an hour.

[*He turns his back to the servant and reads the MS. in his hand.*]

SERVANT.

[*Losing his obsequious manner and speaking excitedly.*] I wish you to understand, Monsieur, that every word I said of you, and which you have repeated, is true. You are a hireling and you try to play the master. You are a nonentity and you affect the manners of the Grand Seigneur. Furthermore, I know that you dislike me, and dismiss me, because I am a Bonapartist, like the Colonel, while you are a Royalist, like the cowards beyond the frontier. You . . .

BIRSON.

[*Calmly. Facing the servant.*] Do you see the door?

SERVANT.

[*With an air of defiance. Door half open.*] My day will come.

[*Servant withdraws. After a minute's pause,* BIRSON *rings bell. Page enters.*]

BIRSON.

Tell Edmond I wish to see him. [*Page goes out.* EDMOND *enters.*] Edmond, I have, for good cause, dismissed Armand. It pained me to do so. Material is becoming scarce. All the men are being drawn into the army. If this continues, we shall have no more servants, no more tenants, no more farmers—nothing but women and children . . . and [*aside*] obviously few of the latter . . . Edmond, you will take Armand's place, but profit by his experience; don't talk too much—especially about me.

SERVANT.

[*Bowing.*] Thank you, Monsieur; thank you . . . I shall profit by Armand's experience . . .

[EDMOND *goes out.* BIRSON, *his hands behind his back, walks up and down the room, speaking to himself, and occasionally aloud.*]

BIRSON.

I shall be master here . . . and continue master . . .

PAGE.

Madame and Mademoiselle de la Marthe.

BIRSON.

[*Evidently annoyed. Hesitating, and then in a resigned tone.*] I'll see them. [*Page goes out, and, the next moment, ushers in the ladies—both of them curiosities in their way. The elder, dressed in the utmost simplicity, has preciseness of speech and dignity of manner. The younger—her daughter—tries to conceal her forty years by an elaborate toilette and a frivolity of speech and manner bordering on the ludicrous.*] Ah, my dear aunt and charming cousin! [*He kisses their hands.*] I am delighted to see you. To what am I indebted for this unexpected visit?

MADAME DE LA MARTHE.

[*Solemnly.*] Family news of importance.

MDLLE. DE LA MARTHE.

[*Rolling her eyes and clasping her hands in an ecstatic manner.*] Of importance, indeed! of importance to me!

BIRSON.

[*Astonished.*] What? Are you to be married, Christine?

MDLLE. DE LA MARTHE.

Yes—I am to be married—before long.

MADAME DE LA MARTHE.

Christine is speaking inferentially. The fact is that Corisande is to marry St. Arnauldt.

BIRSON.

Indeed! Both are to be congratulated.

MADAME DE LA MARTHE.

And you remember the old family tradition?

BIRSON.

[*Confused.*] Of so many, which one?

MDLLE. DE LA MARTHE.

The most delightful of all!

MADAME DE LA MARTHE.

One marriage in the family always followed by two others within the twelvemonth.

BIRSON.

[*Joyfully.*] It never failed.

MDLLE. DE LA MARTHE.

[*More joyfully.*] It never will.

MADAME DE LA MARTHE.

Be calm, my child. [*Turning to Birson.*] The question which puzzles us is this: Does the tradition refer to three marriages in the family, or to three members of the family being married?

MDLLE. DE LA MARTHE.

[*With emphasis.*] I claim it is three marriages.

BIRSON.

Why do you insist?

[*Mademoiselle looks coy—moves her foot nervously—and remains silent.*]

MADAME DE LA MARTHE.

Because it gives her one chance more—poor child.

BIRSON.

How so?

MDLLE. DE LA MARTHE.

Corisande and St. Arnauldt are not only cousins of ours—but they, themselves, are cousins. Being cousins, it follows that while there are two members of the family being married, there will be but one wedding—hence, according to tradition, two other weddings will follow.

[*She takes a few steps of a merry dance.*]

MADAME DE LA MARTHE.

[*Solemnly.*] With prospects of peace, the officers will be returning.

MDLLE. DE LA MARTHE.

[*Rapturously.*] What joy!

MADAME DE LA MARTHE.

Up to now, victories abroad have accumulated, and opportunities at home have diminished.

MDLLE. DE LA MARTHE.

All this glory has been purely masculine. It has not brought joy to maidens' hearts.

MADAME DE LA MARTHE.

Do not complain, my child. Had you married earlier, you would probably be, to-day, one of the thousands of widows in France.

BIRSON.

Do not despair, my cousin; Corisande and St. Arnauldt are to marry, and two marriages in the family will follow.

MADAME DE LA MARTHE.

[*Sighing.*] I hope Christine's will be the second.

BIRSON.

[*Prophetically.*] If at all, it will be the third.

MADAME AND MDLLE. DE LA MARTHE.

The third! The third!

MDLLE. DE LA MARTHE.

And pray, whose will the second be?

BIRSON.

[*Hesitating a moment—then drawing himself up proudly.*] Mine—Jean Gabriel de Birson's.

MADAME DE LA MARTHE.

You?

BIRSON.

I—as stated.

MLLE. DE LA MARTHE.

To whom?

BIRSON.

[*After looking around the room, and seeing that the door is closed.*] To Mademoiselle Vimont.

MADAME DE LA MARTHE.

The Colonel's sister?

BIRSON.

The Colonel's sister.

MADAME DE LA MARTHE.

Have you proposed to her?

BIRSON.

No—but I propose doing so—and while you are here, I wish to consult you as to the best manner to proceed. You know she has no parents here whom I can approach.

MADAME DE LA MARTHE.

But her brother? . . . She tells everyone she promised her brother never to pledge herself without his consent.

BIRSON.

True—but her brother will never return.

MADAME DE LA MARTHE.

What do you mean?

BIRSON.

Vimont is a maniac on the battlefield; he is always in the thick of the fight, where danger is greatest; and, mark my words, the battlefield will claim him as a victim.

MADAME DE LA MARTHE.

A victim to the greed, the ambition, of Napoleon.

MDLLE. DE LA MARTHE.

You think she will accept you?

BIRSON.

[*Swelling with pride.*] Why not? She has always been amiable to me. I am her brother's best friend, as my father was to his father. And then you know there is always a tendency—a natural and a wise tendency—on the part of a new régime to associate itself with the old—especially with a family as old and as distinguished as ours.

MADAME DE LA MARTHE.

I hope so. She may rehabilitate the family fortunes. She must be very rich.

BIRSON.

Immensely rich . . . and exquisitely charming. But tell me, which of the two plans would you think the likelier to succeed: a proposal—a direct proposal . . . Frankly, I do not quite approve of this method . . . I am so timid in such matters . . . or an indirect proposal, by means of what we might call a ruse?

MADAME DE LA MARTHE.

A ruse— What do you mean to imply thereby?

BIRSON.

This—You know that one of my duties as Mademoiselle Vimont's preceptor is to read to her three times a week—any subject I please. I have composed something . . . the MS. is

there . . . [*he points to the table*] in which I relate—as having occurred in the olden times—a case somewhat similar to mine. This will introduce the situation, and by leading gently to the subject, allow me to approach it with greater ease.

MDLLE. DE LA MARTHE.

How romantic!

MADAME DE LA MARTHE.

[*Rising to leave.*] Any plan will do, my dear Jean, provided it succeeds. I hope you and Christine will not be disappointed . . . Do not fail to write and congratulate Corisande and St. Arnauldt.

[BIRSON *escorts them to the door and bows them out. He walks the floor silently for a few moments. Looks at the clock.*]

BIRSON.

Half an hour before she comes . . . I shall risk it to-day. I must not miss the opportunity of making mine one of the three weddings the family is to celebrate this year. [*He takes the MS. in hand; resumes his position at head of the table. Reads.*] "On the wooded banks of the Arno, not far from the ancient city of Florence . . ." [ALIXE, *a girl of eighteen, in Empire dress, enters.* BIRSON, *embarrassed, bows low.*] I am flattered, though somewhat disconcerted, by

Mademoiselle's appearance before the usual hour.

ALIXE.

I was induced to come earlier, Monsieur de Birson, by my desire to know whether you have news of my brother.

BIRSON.

I have none, or I should have hastened to inform Mademoiselle.

ALIXE.

I have weird apprehensions. It is over two months since Friedland was fought, and yet not a word from Eugene, not a word from his friends. I am growing anxious, impatient.

BIRSON.

I am convinced Mademoiselle's anxiety is unfounded.

ALIXE.

If my anxiety be unfounded, then, surely, my impatience is well founded. If he be alive and well, why does he not write?

BIRSON.

[*Gallantly.*] Letters, like love sighs, Mademoiselle, do not always reach destination.

ALIXE.

I fear that dream—that constant dream of his—the marshal's bâton—will lure him on to reckless deeds, to unforeseen dangers.

BIRSON.

Have no fear, Mademoiselle; the Colonel will come when least expected, as do most things in life.

ALIXE.

Then I shall try not to expect him, and listen attentively to your discourse.

BIRSON.

The punctuality with which Mademoiselle attends my lectures pleases me, and leads me to believe that the part, however humble, I am called upon to play in her education is not disagreeable to her.

ALIXE.

What I first considered a duty, in obedience to my brother's wishes, I now consider a pleasure. What is your subject to-day, Monsieur de Birson?

BIRSON.

My subject? Let me see—ah! it is not exactly what might be called a subject . . . A scene from an old Italian romance . . . by one little known, in the world of letters at least. It will,

I hope, prove a pleasant diversion for Mademoiselle.

ALIXE.

[*Taking her seat in the old arm-chair with high back.*] I am interested.

BIRSON.

[*Going to the table and turning over the pages of the MS. Apparently embarrassed.*] The original is in Italian; the translation is my own. [*He takes a position at the head of the table, opposite* ALIXE. *He recites mainly from memory, referring occasionally to the MS. His delivery is slow and clear; his attitude and manner that of a poet reciting his verses to his lady-love.*] On the wooded banks of the Arno, not far from the ancient city of Florence, stood a palace surrounded by a vast domain. Here, attended by her maids, lived the Princess Amarinta—now in her sixteenth year—the sole survivor of the princely house of Borimenti. The last worldly act of her father was to confide her to the care of Luigi, his faithful secretary—a man of noble birth but shattered fortune. The austerity of Luigi's life compensated, in the Prince's eyes, for his lack of years. His child would be safe in the hands of one who, without the priest's robes, had all the priest's virtues. But mortals, for being austere, are none the less mortal. They have eyes which reflect the beauty around them; they have passions which surge within them. Luigi, having vainly resisted his nature, became

a slave to the charms of the fair Princess. But his heart beat secretly; his tongue was silent, and Amarinta little dreamed there dwelt in her palace one who found within its gloomy walls more than the entire outer world could offer. She—she sighed to wander beyond those walls, to find that which she could not find within. Timidly at first, and then with increased candor, she spoke to Luigi of many things of which she had heard; of the great cities—Florence, Rome, Naples. And he, with solemn look, shook his head and said, "Snares these cities be; traps for the unwary; traps for morals, for unsuspecting virtue." When, anon and again, the Princess thus spoke of the world without, Luigi grew sad, and deemed his fair world approaching an end. Once, alas for him! she asked if there lived in her day, as of old, knights who were handsome and bold, who, to win their lady's hand, sought adventure in distant lands, returning with laurels on their brow. She had read of such in books; did they live in the flesh? Luigi, with severe brow but tender voice, bade her beware of the poet's fancy—the glamour of romance. The days of chivalry were over . . . her books referred to times of long, long ago.

[*Page enters.*]

BIRSON.

[*Looking angrily at page.*] Is it important that you should disturb me?

PAGE.

[*With an air of triumph.*] A letter for Mademoiselle!

ALIXE.

[*As the page advances towards her.*] Can it be news from Eugene? [*She opens the letter and reads it.*] Alas no! Others, like myself, are anxious for news of him. [*She goes to the table, writes a short note, which she hands to page. Page withdraws.*] How good our neighbors are . . . Monsieur de Birson, I was following you with interest. Pray continue.

BIRSON.

[*Resuming his attitude and continuing the narrative.*] Day by day the Princess grew more restless, like a bird, long caged, sighing for the fields and forests. Her maids worried as they noticed her increasing melancholy. The oldest of them made bold to speak to Luigi. "I fear," she said, "our mistress, the Princess, is pining away. She craves excitement; she craves . . ."—"Youth craves many things," quoth Luigi; "but is not the bitterness of ignorance less than that of knowledge? The world of our imagination is fairer than the world of our vision. Should we, willfully, draw aside the veil of Illusion, beyond which is concealed the specter of Disenchantment? The fool's paradise is at least a paradise. The wise man—so called—lives in a laboratory, a dissecting-room; he analyzes all things and

learns to despise all things . . ."—"Ah me!" sighed the duenna; "you are a learned man." And returning to the maids, she whispered with an air of wisdom, "The Princess is unhappy as she is, it is true; but might she not be unhappier if she were otherwise than she is?"

Luigi continued to hear—too often for his peace of mind!—of the outer world, of brave knights, of bold deeds, and he began to fear lest —unless he, himself, proved brave and bold—joy should vanish from his life forever . . . One soft, quiet evening, as the sun, in a blaze of color, was setting beyond the trees on the southern bank of the Arno, Amarinta sat at her lattice, gazing less at the scene before her than meditating on what lay beyond her view, when Luigi, moved by some power beyond his control, entered the room and stood in her presence.

"Fair Princess," he said—his voice trembling with emotion—"do you deem it audacious of mortal to gaze at the sun in the heavens?"

"The sun is in the heavens to give light and warmth to mortals," answered Amarinta.

"Fair Princess, do you deem it presumptuous of the violet to rest on the bosom of the maiden?"

"For that purpose," replied Amarinta, "the violet is sought and is prized."

"And what, O Princess! would you think of the slave who dared look longingly in the eyes of his mistress?"

"Ah, therein, I surmise, lies something of a difference."

"And yet, fair Princess, less difference lies be-

tween the slave and his mistress, than between the violet and the maiden. They, at least, are of the same nature; both have hearts, both have passions . . ."

"True," said the Princess . . . "Continue, good Luigi, continue . . ." But Luigi stood silent and dared not proceed.

[*Reciting these last lines*, BIRSON'S *voice betrays his inner thoughts. With one hand he rests against the table, while the other nervously clutches the MS.*]

ALIXE.

Continue . . .

BIRSON.

[*With faltering voice.*] I cannot.

ALIXE.

Continue, I pray you, Monsieur de Birson; I would know the end. [BIRSON *remains silent—now looking fixedly at the floor, then, in a semi-imploring way, at* ALIXE. *The latter, alarmed, rises and approaches him.*] The story you have related has affected you deeply.

BIRSON.

[*With suppressed emotion.*] It has—deeply.

ALIXE.

Yet it is but fiction.

BIRSON.

[*With emphasis.*] It is reality.

ALIXE.

Its characters are dead.

BIRSON.

They both live.

ALIXE.

Where?

BIRSON.

In this château.

ALIXE.

Who are they?

BIRSON.

[*After a moment's pause.*] The Princess is yourself; her lover [*he falls on his knees before her*] myself.

[PAGE *enters.* BIRSON, *confused, rises.*]

PAGE.

The Marquis de Mirvoisin desires to see Monsieur.

BIRSON.

[*Impatiently.*] That ever-present nephew of

mine! Tell him I am engaged . . . that I cannot see him.

ALIXE.

Pardon, Monsieur de Birson—I should like to see Monsieur de Mirvoisin. Maybe he, or some of his friends, has later news from Friedland.

[BIRSON, *disconcerted, looks appealingly at* ALIXE. *Page opens door. The* MARQUIS—*a bright, jovial young man, in riding suit—comes in with a dash, but, upon perceiving* ALIXE, *he stops short and bows low.*]

MIRVOISIN.

I crave your pardon, Mademoiselle, for appearing before you thus. In truth, I expected to see my uncle alone—but, for once, realization has surpassed expectation. [*He kisses her hand.*]

ALIXE.

You will be forgiven cheerfully, Monsieur de Mirvoisin, if you give me tidings of my brother. Have you heard from him, or of him?

MIRVOISIN.

It pains me to be unable to give the answer you desire. But rest assured, Mademoiselle, that one so favored by fortune—loved by the fairest of sisters and cared for by the mightiest of emperors—will never be in a position other than to awaken the envy of all men.

ALIXE.

I pray this may be so. And now—since you came to see Monsieur de Birson, and not me—I leave you to his good care.

[ALIXE *goes out—the* MARQUIS *bowing low and following her with his eyes.*]

MIRVOISIN.

Ah, uncle, there is in that woman a charm—a something, I know not what—which makes me feel that I would do great, yes, desperate, things to win her.

BIRSON.

[*Sarcastically.*] I have heard something to that effect before.

MIRVOISIN.

I know I have been in love ere this—and often—but until I saw Mademoiselle Vimont I never felt what is called, and truly called, a grand passion. And do you know—why should I not tell you, since you are so close to me?—there is an inner voice which whispers that she is not indifferent to my love. It is not conceit . . .

BIRSON.

[*Raising his eyes.*] Conceit, indeed!

MIRVOISIN.

But when I bring her hand to my lips, I feel it

tremble, and I fancy it lingers willingly within my grasp.

BIRSON.

Your fancy does offense to your modesty.

MIRVOISIN.

Ah, uncle, dear, cynical uncle—you sneer at all this.

BIRSON.

Cynicism may be part of my composition, but obviously intuition does not enter into yours.

MIRVOISIN.

I have often heard you state—wherein, by the way, I do not agree with you—that the Bonapartists are all parvenus.

BIRSON.

With rare exceptions, they are.

MIRVOISIN.

Admitting, for the sake of argument, your statement to be true, it should follow that an alliance with a member of the old nobility would be exceedingly gratifying to a Bonapartist.

BIRSON.

[*With an air of satisfaction.*] I quite agree with you.

MIRVOISIN.

It would give them a cachet which they otherwise lack.

BIRSON.

I fully agree with you.

MIRVOISIN.

It would also give them that which, according to you, they need—a foundation of stability.

BIRSON.

I agree with you there, also; but where I do not agree with you is, that the Vimonts, who undoubtedly aspire to all this, need fall back on *you* to secure it.

MIRVOISIN.

Ah, indeed! [*With malicious smile.*] And, pray, what would be their objections to me?

BIRSON.

[*With an air of authority.*] Be satisfied with the information I offer—that they will secure what they wish in that line, and will secure it without your intervention.

MIRVOISIN.

Would the objections, you imagine, come from Mademoiselle Vimont, or from her brother ?

BIRSON.

Your question is pointed. The Colonel would object . . . but that I put aside as of little consequence.

MIRVOISIN.

By that you mean?

BIRSON.

Simply this: foolhardiness must meet the fate it courts. A man may brave the cannon's mouth once, twice, a dozen times perhaps, but the cannon's day will come. [*Mysteriously.*] Have not more than two months elapsed since Friedland, and not a sign from him?

MIRVOISIN.

He may be the bearer of his own sign—your forebodings notwithstanding. But tell me, uncle mine, you who know so much, who is the lucky man who is to win Mademoiselle Vimont's hand?

BIRSON.

Inquisitiveness seldom hears the answer it expects. [*A pause.*] By the way, who do *you* imagine will be the lucky man?

MIRVOISIN.

Supposing I were to tell you it was I . . . what would you say?

BIRSON.

I would say that, like Æsop's, your mind runs to fables.

MIRVOISIN.

It is in the fable we find the greatest truth.

BIRSON.

Your assertion is the fable minus the truth.

MIRVOISIN.

It is the truth minus the fable. [*Taking* BIRSON'S *hands.*] Congratulate me, uncle.

BIRSON.

[*Drawing his hands away.*] You . . . You . . . I do not believe it.

MIRVOISIN.

Your disbelief does not alter the fact.

BIRSON.

[*With bitterness.*] Did you propose to Mademoiselle Vimont?

MIRVOISIN.

I did.

BIRSON.

Did she say "yes"?

MIRVOISIN.

She did not say "no."

BIRSON.

Ah! as I thought . . . like a woman, you jumped at a conclusion.

MIRVOISIN.

No—unlike you, I did not jump at a conclusion.

BIRSON.

What, then, did she say?

MIRVOISIN.

She said what I knew—what you know—that having promised her brother not to engage herself definitely without first consulting him, I should have to wait—that he would return before long, and then . . . Is it clear enough?

BIRSON.

It would be clearer if your statement were confirmed by the young lady herself . . . I propose to ascertain . . .

MIRVOISIN.

[*With an angry movement.*] It will be at your peril! . . . Now mark what I say—if you betray my secret, which is also her secret, not only will

you incur her eternal displeasure, but [*changing his voice to gentler tones*] you will injure my cause, and this, dear uncle, I know you would not do. [*A moment's pause, during which* BIRSON *shows great nervousness.* MIRVOISIN *approaches him and takes his hands affectionately.*] May I not depend on you to remain silent on what I have just revealed to you? May I not count also on your material assistance? Praise me to Mademoiselle Vimont—you can praise so sweetly when you desire; to Vimont, when he returns, relate my virtues, even exaggerate them—this, coming from you, will not be out of place—and you exaggerate so artfully when the spirit moves you.

BIRSON.

[*With affected calmness.*] I shall, as you request, remain silent in regard to the statement you have just made; silent, also, I shall remain in regard to the praises you would have me sing in your behalf. I cannot utter words which do not find an echo in my heart. Nay, if I spoke at all, I should express indignation that you, a Mirvoisin—a Mirvoisin whose ancestors have been loaded with favors by the King—should think of allying yourself to a family whose head is fighting under the usurper's banner.

MIRVOISIN.

Still harping on that subject!

BIRSON.

Since you present it to me, why should I not harp thereon? The step you have taken convinces me of that which I have long suspected: your total lack of principles.

MIRVOISIN.

Principles, esteemed uncle, are excellent things so long as they can be followed. Where they cannot be followed, you might as well chase rainbows—beautiful, certainly, but as useless as they are intangible. You do reverence to dead principles; I do reverence to living ones. Were the King alive, no more loyal subject would he have than I; no more valiant soldier—but Royalty is no more.

BIRSON.

[*With emphasis.*] Royalty never dies. The King is dead; long live the King!

MIRVOISIN.

But *where* is the King? Where his court, his courtiers? Who witnesses his presence? Who hears his commands? The King is dead, and no King lives to take his place. Napoleon lives, he reigns . . .

BIRSON.

He usurps . . .

MIRVOISIN.

He is an actuality—a personality.

BIRSON.

He is a dark cloud—a shadow—passing over France.

MIRVOISIN.

A shadow!—a shadow, the hero of Marengo! a shadow, the victor of Austerlitz! a shadow, the conqueror at Friedland! a shadow, the power which compelled Austria, Prussia, Russia, to bite the dust, and made of France the mistress of Europe. Ah, let us, Royalists at heart, bow to the inevitable, especially since it is a glorious inevitable!

BIRSON.

What words from one who once professed loyalty to his country!

MIRVOISIN.

[*Striking his chest.*] And still professes it!

BIRSON.

It is obvious that you have caught the contagion of the age—the spirit of revolution, of change. That the timid and the adventurous should submit to the new order of things, I understand—but you . . .

MIRVOISIN.

And you—have you not submitted to the new order of things in a most striking manner—secretary to a Bonapartist colonel; preceptor to his Bonapartist sister? [*Laughs.*]

BIRSON.

If I submit, it is, as you well know, because circumstances compel me. You, on the contrary, still have wealth; you are independent . . .

MIRVOISIN.

[*Sarcastically.*] What would you have me do—overthrow Bonaparte?

[ALIXE *enters, in an excited state, a letter in her hand.*]

ALIXE.

I have news from Eugene . . . news . . . but what news! [*She hands the letter to* BIRSON.] Read it.

BIRSON.

[*Glancing at the letter.*] From Colonel Lestrier! [*He reads.*] I write at the command of the Emperor. It is with mixed feelings of grief and joy that I fulfill the duty imposed upon me by his Majesty. Your brother, Colonel Vimont, distinguished himself gallantly at Friedland. He won the approval of the Emperor, the admiration of the army, and an enduring place in the

realms of Fame. Unfortunately, and by a remarkable coincidence—rare even in the strange annals of war—he was, within the space of a few moments, wounded in the two arms, necessitating the amputation of both members. But be reassured, Mademoiselle; your esteemed brother, whose valuable life was once despaired of, now enjoys excellent health. You may expect to embrace him shortly after the receipt of this letter.

It affords me a lively satisfaction, Mademoiselle, to inform you that it has pleased his Majesty the Emperor, in recognition of Colonel Vimont's gallant services, to promote him to the rank of General and to confer on him the cordon of the Legion of Honor.

I beg of you, Mademoiselle, to accept the expression of my most distinguished consideration.

LESTRIER.

[BIRSON, *embarrassed, hands the letter to* ALIXE.]

ALIXE.

I know not whether to mourn or to rejoice.

MIRVOISIN.

Rejoice, Mademoiselle, rejoice. Let us be thankful that where so many brave men lost their lives, the bravest of all only lost his arms.

ALIXE.

True, it is fitting we should rejoice—for has he

not escaped the grave by the rarest of miracles? . . . Ah, what joy to think he lives—that every instant brings him nearer to us—that he may be here at any moment . . . Quick! we must prepare. Let the château assume a festal appearance; let the flag be unfurled from the eastern turret. . . . You, Monsieur de Mirvoisin, do me a service. I cannot, in my present state of mind, write to our friends to give them the news. Will you see them—the Marsigneries, the Marots, Fresney, all of them—and say I wish them to attend a little *fête* the day after Eugene's arrival—to drink to his health and celebrate his return.

MIRVOISIN.

I am always at your service, Mademoiselle, but never more cheerfully so than on this occasion.

[*He kisses her hand, and goes out.*]

ALIXE.

You, Monsieur de Birson, be good enough to tell Edmond to see that Eugene's apartments are prepared.

BIRSON.

Mademoiselle . . .

ALIXE.

[*Listening.*] What is that I hear?

BIRSON.

Mademoiselle . . .

ALIXE.

Listen. [*The cracking of whips, the tramping of horses, and rolling of wheels are heard in the courtyard.* ALIXE *rushes to the window.*] It is he! it is he! [*She goes to the door, which opens at her approach, and* EUGENE, *in the uniform of a General, enters. He is young, and wears a military cape to conceal the loss of his arms.* ALIXE *throws her arms around his neck.*] Thanks be to heaven —here you are at last!

VIMONT.

[*Wearily.*] Yes, here I am—what is left of me.

ALIXE.

[*Disappointed.*] What! You do not seem happy to see me.

VIMONT.

Yes, I am happy to see you—happier, no doubt, to see you well and strong, than you to see me thus.

ALIXE.

It is you—that suffices . . . Let me remove your kolbach.

VIMONT.

[*Shaking his head impatiently.*] No! [*He sits in an arm-chair. A servant offers to remove his cape. He rises abruptly, and, with an angry look, says in a loud voice.*] Leave me alone! I am not paralyzed, impotent. I know what I want; I do what I desire. [*With a sudden, rapid movement of the head, he throws his kolbach to the floor, and turning to the servant.*] My cape remains; I wish it to remain. Do you understand ?

[*Every one has a frightened look.* BIRSON *withdraws to a corner. The servants escape from the room.* ALIXE *approaches her brother, places her hands on his shoulders, looks appealingly into his eyes.*]

END OF FIRST ACT.

THE SECOND ACT.

THE DESCRIPTION OF FRIEDLAND.

Time: Afternoon of the Following Day.

Terrace adjoining château, a wing of which is seen. Large overhanging tree, through the branches of which appears a landscape in the distance. Broad steps, to the left, lead up to the terrace, in the wall of which is a curved stone seat. A table, with books and papers—several chairs—shrubs in large pots. A gardener is placing a few plants on the terrace. EDMOND *is arranging the tables and chairs. They stop near the steps, the gardener with a flower-pot in hand,* EDMOND *holding on to the back of a chair. The latter acts nervously, as though afraid of being surprised.*

GARDENER.

Is he very much changed?

EDMOND.

What a question? Suppose you were to lose two of something you have on your body—two legs, two ears, two eyes—wouldn't you be changed?

GARDENER.

I suppose so—but it might have been worse.

EDMOND.

In one way, yes; in another way, no. When he lets loose his temper [*he looks around anxiously*] it would put a whole regiment to flight.

GARDENER.

It is fortunate, then, that, with such a temper, he has no arms to strike with.

EDMOND.

Idiot! Can't you understand—it is because he lost his arms that he loses his temper.

GARDENER.

That's so. Then we had better keep away from his boots.

EDMOND.

[*Looking towards château.*] Here he comes—let us escape.

[*They disappear below the terrace.* VIMONT, *in uniform, followed by his orderly, emerges from the château. He stands near the wall of the terrace, and looks out at the country before him—then he turns suddenly to orderly.*]

VIMONT.

Audré—the Moniteur.

AUDRÉ.

Yes, General.

[*Orderly enters château and returns in an instant. He spreads the Moniteur on the table.* VIMONT *sits down and scans the sheet.*]

VIMONT.

[*After reading a while.*] What is this? . . . [*Reads further.*] Of course, of course—it is as I expected . . . Renaud is promoted . . . Another campaign, and he'll be a marshal. [*He reads further.*] Ah! England is being aroused . . . Humph! She had better beware, or London will witness the same scenes as did Vienna and Berlin . . . With a genius like the Emperor's, the channel counts for naught . . . Audré, turn the page. [*Audré does as directed. After glancing over the columns,* VIMONT *rises and paces the terrace impatiently.*] Yes, yes, everywhere there is feverish excitement—everything is in a state of turmoil—everyone on the tiptoe of expectancy—the map of Europe is being changed—great events are preparing—the world moves, and here I am, like a prisoner, caged in a castle . . .

[ALIXE, *in Empire gown, appears on the terrace. After embracing him, she stands for a moment, looking at him silently. Orderly withdraws.*]

ALIXE.

Ah, Eugene, what a joy it is to have you home again!

VIMONT.

Even as I am?

ALIXE.

Even as you are.

VIMONT.

Alas! I cannot embrace and caress you as of yore, Alixe.

ALIXE.

No—but I can embrace and caress you. [*She places her arms around his neck.*] You will never know the loss of your arms; mine will replace yours, and do for you what your own would have done. [*He looks at her affectionately, suppresses a sigh, and falls heavily into a seat. She sits on a stool, at his feet.*] You are tired, Eugene?

VIMONT.

Yes, I am tired. It will take many days to recover from that long, wearisome trip—and under such circumstances.

ALIXE.

I regret now having asked our friends to meet you so soon after your arrival—but they

were so anxious to welcome you and celebrate your return.

VIMONT.

Celebrate my return! . . . Your thought was a kind one, I know, Alixe; but [*looking at his sides, where once his arms were*] does this call for celebration?

ALIXE.

[*Embarrassed.*] But why . . . why not?

VIMONT.

Look at me! Armless, useless, a subject of curiosity. People will ridicule me.

ALIXE.

Oh, no! Ridicule a brave general, who lost his arms in the service of his Emperor—never!

VIMONT.

A general without an army; a general, alas! who will never again mount a horse, never again see a battlefield, never again serve his country—my uniform becomes a mockery, and people, I tell you, mock me.

ALIXE.

I cannot believe it.

VIMONT.

Believe it or not, it is a fact. While eating in

a café in a frontier town, four days ago, all eyes were turned on me, and as my orderly cut the meat and brought it to my mouth, the onlookers chuckled . . . the brutes! [EDMOND *enters.*]

EDMOND.

The tenants are here and express a desire to . . .

VIMONT.

I do not wish to see them—to see anyone. [*He rises to leave.*]

ALIXE.

Eugene! . . . Receive them — they will remain but a moment.

VIMONT.

[*Impatiently.*] Very well. [*To* EDMOND.] I'll see them. [EDMOND *goes out.*] How many ordeals shall I have to go through? [*He paces the terrace.*] You will see that my tenants, like everyone else, will feel embarrassed on approaching me.

[*The tenants—ten or twelve in number—ascend the steps, escorted by* EDMOND. *They wear the costume of the day. Their embarrassment is obvious. They bow frequently. Some say,* "Welcome, Monsieur Vimont"; *others,* "Welcome, Colonel"; *others,* "Welcome, General." VIMONT *advances to meet them.*]

VIMONT.

I am glad to see you again. [*An old farmer, of quaint appearance and comical expression, advances with extended hand towards* VIMONT, *who retreats, as the farmer advances, to escape the extended hand. The other tenants look at each other, alarmed.*] My arms are on the battlefield; I cannot shake hands with you.

OLD FARMER.

[*Looking apologetically at his companions.*] I had forgotten that. [*To* VIMONT.] We are glad to see you home, Colonel, and rejoice that you only lost your arms . . . [*Pause.*] May the Almighty, without whose will nothing happens, long preserve you from further misfortunes . . . [*Silence.*] We have asked Monsieur Bosquet to express to you our sentiments on this auspicious occasion.

[*He steps aside, and* BOSQUET, *elaborately dressed for the occasion, moves forward. Timidity, combined with consciousness of the importance of his mission, gives* BOSQUET *an awkward appearance. He bows low, coughs loud, unrolls a large sheet of paper which he reads, sometimes fast, sometimes slow, halting frequently and repeating the last word of each sentence.*]

BOSQUET.

[*Reading.*] Mon Général! The duties of a

great nation are divided—divided. There are those whose duty it is to cultivate the land for the people—the people—and those whose duty it is to protect the land from the invader—the invader. We are amongst the first—first—you are amongst the last—last. We have endeavored to perform our duty to the best of our ability, and we have every reason to believe that you have done the same—the same. Have you not followed the great Emperor in his perilous and yet victorious march across the continent—continent? Have you not thrashed the Prussians, the Russians, the Austrians, the whole world—world? Have you not returned from the war with proof of your bravery? Mixed with our sincere sympathy for you and for Mademoiselle, your sister, are sentiments of pride, in which the entire nation joins—joins. We honor you and respect you, and you may always count on our devotion and attachment—attachment. Long live the Emperor!

[*He bows low several times and backs awkwardly into his companions.*]

VIMONT.

I thank you all for your kind sentiments, which I reciprocate. I congratulate you upon still being able to perform that duty which, as you say, is incumbent on a portion of the nation. [*He goes amongst them and addresses a few words to each. He stops a moment before a tall, robust fellow.*] How have you been, Vignier?

VIGNIER.

With me, General, as with the country—everything is flourishing since the great Emperor rules France. I have but one anxiety.

VIMONT.

And that is?

VIGNIER.

That I may be called at the next conscription—for I have no boys to work my farm—but pardieu! if it happens that way, I'll be ready—I'll throw down the spade and take up the musket, and shouting, "Long live the Emperor," rush to the battlefield.

VIMONT.

Lucky man to have in prospect such a noble career . . . [*Tenants withdraw in a confused manner—some bowing to* ALIXE, *others to* VIMONT *—some to the right, others to the left.* VIMONT *turns to his sister.*] You see how embarrassing it is for me and for others. A man in my condition should avoid these scenes.

ALIXE.

You are oversensitive, Eugene. Many men have lived, and filled the world with their fame, though more unfortunate than you. There was the great poet . . .

VIMONT.

Ah, your poet is a writer of rhymes, of ballads, of love songs—a dreamer! I—I am, or was, a soldier, a man of action. The smell of powder was my incense, the roar of cannon my music, the battlefield my playground. Fame, based on performance; fame, based on heroic deeds, was my ambition—and now . . . now all is over. My life can be of no further use to myself or to others.

ALIXE.

[*Chagrined.*] You include me in the others?

VIMONT.

I include you in the "others," Alixe, not in accordance with my desire, but in recognition of a law which, perhaps, it is best you should submit to. You are young . . . you are beautiful . . . you are rich; you will, some day, meet one to whom you will give more, to whom you will owe more, than to your poor brother. Do not protest—it is well, it is right, that you should do so. My life would be a double burden to bear, were I to realize that you, sweet Alixe, were doomed to be a sister of charity—ever tending me, ever watching by my side.

ALIXE.

It would be no burdensome task. It would pain me less, far less, than does the gloomy view you take of your condition.

VIMONT.

Take! I do not take it—it is forced upon me, impressed upon me—incessantly, irresistibly—wherever I go. I cannot escape it . . . Ah! the miserable wretch! I remember his face well—if only I could have smitten it! It was the day I left the hospital; I was surrounded by some officers and a few civilians. One of the latter was offering me consolation for what he termed my great misfortune. He spoke as though it were a personal mishap, and nothing more, while I, a soldier, thinking only of my country, exclaimed, "Alas! what grieves me most is that my arms are lost to France."—"Console yourself," muttered a bystander, "Napoleon still lives!" . . . Blindness, lameness, may be becoming to a poet, but an armless body for a soldier . . .

ALIXE.

Forget that you were a soldier; remember . . .

VIMONT.

Forget that I was a soldier! Forget all I once aspired to: a place in the heart of my countrymen; a page in the annals of history—side by side with the greatest heroes of all time. You, of a gentle sex, you know not the fire of ambition, the allurements of fame. You, who have passed your days in this peaceful abode; you, who have never wandered in the fields of glory, you know naught of its pleasures, its intoxication. Ah! to

have fought at Austerlitz and partaken of the feasts of Schönbrunn; to have participated in the victory of Jena, and the triumphant entry in the great Frederick's capital; to have seen the mighty hosts of the north flee before our victorious eagles; to have heard the shouts, the huzzahs, of the admiring multitudes; to have had the great Emperor extend his imperial hand and place on my breast the Cross of Honor; to have tasted of victory, drunk from the cup of glory, and seen rising before me dazzling altitudes of fame, and then, suddenly, in a cruel hour, have the ladder I was ascending cut from under me . . . and you wonder, Alixe, that I have lost the joy of living!

ALIXE.

That was the dream of the soldier . . . it is dispelled. You are still a man, and other vistas, less glaring, perhaps, but far nobler, open up before you. War . . .

VIMONT.

War was my profession.

ALIXE.

But war is cruel—its profession inhuman. You remember its glories and forget its horrors. Victory for some implies defeat for others. Triumph on one side means humiliation on the other—and oh! the tears, the anxiety—I know them, I have felt them . . .

VIMONT.

And yet—what am I to do? What can I do?

ALIXE.

The world is large—its occupations many. There are emotions, better, nobler, more elevating, than those which war engenders. Surely, if you are willing, if you try, if you look around, you will find something to occupy you, to interest you. [ALIXE *rises and enters the château. A minute later, an old melody—"Amaryllis," for instance—is heard on the piano.* VIMONT, *who has been pacing the terrace impatiently, stops suddenly as he hears the notes; he seems to waken, as though from a dream; his face brightens; he listens attentively. The music ceases.* ALIXE *returns to her brother.*] Do you remember?

VIMONT.

It is the melody Madeleine used to play.

ALIXE.

And which you were so fond of.

VIMONT.

[*Dreamingly.*] Sweet memories of youth—now buried forever.

ALIXE.

Sweet memories which may be revived . . . [*A moment's silence.*] You have not forgotten Madeleine?

VIMONT.

[*Sighing.*] No—I have not.

ALIXE.

You never declared your love to her?

VIMONT.

I never dared to.

ALIXE.

You so brave—so brave as to face a score of men, you dared not face a single maiden.

VIMONT.

I know what to expect from a score of men, but not from the single maiden.

ALIXE.

You will see her . . . She will be here presently.

[EDMOND *enters and announces, as they arrive, the guests, who come on the terrace from the château.*]

EDMOND.

The Count de Fresney.

FRESNEY.

Welcome home, General. We have heard ac-

counts of your daring, your casting aside precaution and defying the Fates. Under these circumstances, we rejoice that you return to us—if not whole, at least alive.

VIMONT.

Thank you, Fresney; thank you—though my view of the case differs somewhat from yours.

FRESNEY.

Ah—I see . . . You mean . . .

EDMOND.

Monsieur and Madame de la Marsignerie.

[*An elderly, distinguished couple.* MONSIEUR *goes up to* VIMONT *and places both hands on his shoulders.*]

MARSIGNERIE.

Fate is kinder to us than to you, my dear General—for now, I hope, we shall keep you here.

MADAME DE LA MARSIGNERIE.

An old friend of your mother, I claim a privilege. [*She kisses him.*]

EDMOND.

The Marquis de Mirvoisin.

MIRVOISIN.

Welcome—a hundred times welcome! Believe

me, my dear Vimont, you came none too soon to relieve the anxiety of Mademoiselle [*he bows to* Alixe], as well as that of a host of friends.

Edmond.

Monsieur, Madame, and Mademoiselle de Marot.

[*When* Madeleine de Marot *makes her appearance and faces* Vimont, *a silent scene must take place—clear in its meaning and yet not over-demonstrative—wherein the emotions which sway them both are betrayed.*]

Marot.

You see we lose no time. Only yesterday did we hear of your arrival, and here we are to bid you welcome.

Vimont.

[*Embarrassed.*] I thank you—I am pleased to see you.

Madame de Marot.

Yours was not the only household which rejoiced at your return.

Vimont.

You are indeed kind, Madame.

Madeleine.

We are delighted to see you again, and

proud too, for you left us a Colonel and return a General.

VIMONT.

A General—alas! Mademoiselle—who is deprived not only of the satisfaction of raising his hand against the enemy, but of raising to his lips the hand of one he . . . esteems.

[MADELEINE, *confused, hesitates a moment, and then slowly raises her hand for him to kiss.* BIRSON *enters in time to witness this scene. He looks on, unobserved, from the rear of the terrace. Servants bring out chairs, tables, refreshments. A desultory conversation ensues—the ladies sitting around the tables—some of the gentlemen leaning over to talk to them. Now and then a ripple of laughter.* M. DE LA MARSIGNERIE *is speaking earnestly to* VIMONT. BIRSON *takes* MIRVOISIN'S *arm and leads him aside. He whispers to him. A moment later* MIRVOISIN *approaches* MADELEINE *and pays her special attention.* VIMONT *is indifferent to what* M. DE LA MARSIGNERIE *is telling him. He watches* MADELEINE *and* MIRVOISIN.]

FRESNEY.

[*Approaching* VIMONT.] I need not tell you, my dear General, that the entire neighborhood has shared the anxiety of Mademoiselle Vimont on your account. First we thought the mails had miscarried or even, perhaps, been intercepted. Then we thought you were mortally

wounded; then we thought . . . well, in substance, we did not know what to think.

[*At this point* MADELEINE *drops her handkerchief.* VIMONT *rushes to pick it up and suddenly realizes his inability to do so. Awkward silence.* MIRVOISIN *picks it up and hands it to* MADELEINE *with a bow.* EDMOND *enters.*]

EDMOND.

His Honor the Mayor of Marcy, accompanied by a delegation, expresses a desire to pay his respects.

[VIMONT *looks annoyed. He whispers to* ALIXE, *who argues with him, and then makes a sign to* EDMOND *to admit the party.* EDMOND *goes out. The ladies keep up a lively chatter till* EDMOND *reappears, followed by the Mayor—a corpulent, pompous individual, arrayed in the regalia of his office. He is accompanied by three prosperous villagers. All bow low to the General, and then to the assembled company. The latter, whenever they can do so unobserved, give evidence of the amusement afforded them by the opera-bouffe appearance and performance of the Mayor.*]

THE MAYOR.

[*Giving his address all due oratorical effect.*] Mon Général! We have come—I, the Mayor of

Marcy, and my three distinguished colleagues, Monsieur Rossignol, Monsieur Crespinet, and Monsieur Montjoli—whom I have the honor to introduce to you—[*he makes a sweeping gesture to the entire company, while his three colleagues bow frequently and low*]—to say that we claim the privilege to share with your family and friends the pleasure of seeing you once more in the peaceful valley of Marcy. No more, no doubt, will you hear the shouts of command, the martial music, the roar of cannon; but you will find compensation for these in the tender voices of loved ones, in the rustic music of field and forest, in the hum of industrial life, which, while far be it from me to deprecate the noble profession of the soldier, is, nevertheless, fully as essential to the welfare and glory of the nation. You have done your duty nobly—[*with a patronizing air*]—be satisfied. You have attained high rank—step aside graciously, and leave open to others the road to promotion. I could, as Mayor of this flourishing commune, dwell lengthily, and with some authority, upon the charms, also the responsibilities, of civic life, as compared with military life; but I shall refrain and reserve my observations for a future, and more suitable, occasion. Before concluding, however, permit me, my dear General—speaking for myself, as well as for the commune I have the honor to preside over—to say that the joy we experience at your return is only equaled by the regret we felt when you left us to follow the path of glory in distant lands. Many years have

elapsed since then; you have served your Emperor and your country with distinction; your fame has preceded you, and the valor of your deeds has become a household word in the cottages as well as in the manor-houses of the valley of Marcy. Having accomplished so much, you have earned a rest. Whatever the love of your family and the respect and esteem of your neighbors can do to make that rest agreeable—*Otium cum dignitate*—will, I am sure, be done. Once more I bid you welcome. May good health and prosperity always attend you and yours. Long live the Emperor! Long live the brave General Vimont!

[*The Mayor uses his handkerchief freely to wipe the perspiration from his brow.*]

VIMONT.

I thank you, Monsieur le Maire, and Messieurs your colleagues, for your friendly visit and the kind sentiments you have expressed. As much as I regret my enforced retirement from active service in the army, I find pleasure and comfort in the hearty welcome home of friends and neighbors. Once more I thank you. [*The Mayor and his colleagues bow low and are about to withdraw, when* VIMONT, *after a moment's hesitation, addresses them.*] Will you not do us the honor to join our party and partake of some refreshments?

THE MAYOR.

[*After consulting his colleagues by glances.*]

The honor, I assure you, General, is all on our side.

[*They join the ladies—partake of refreshments—pay extravagant compliments—make extraordinary breaches of etiquette. Their manners and speech stand out in bold contrast with those of the other guests. Some shepherds and a shepherdess, in holiday attire, and with rustic instruments, appear at the foot of the terrace. They play, sing, and dance. These gone,* MADELEINE *turns to* VIMONT.]

MADELEINE.

I remember, General, your description of the battle of Austerlitz, and oh! how interesting it was. Will you not tell us something of the great battle of Friedland?

VIMONT.

If it will interest you, Mademoiselle, I shall do so with pleasure.

[*While the ladies remain seated in groups, the men form a semi-circle around* VIMONT, *and assume an expectant attitude. To his right is old* M. DE LA MARSIGNERIE. *To the extreme left of the semi-circle is* MIRVOISIN. *Next to the latter is* FRESNEY. VIMONT *commences his narrative in a rather languid tone, but waxes excited as he recalls and describes the picture, the action, of the battle. He uses his feet to indicate the position of the two armies.*]

It was the fourteenth of June—the anniversary of Marengo. A good omen! . . . The Tsar seemed anxious for an opportunity to redeem the defeat of Eylau; the Emperor, no less anxious to add another to the list of his glorious victories. The inactivity which the past season had imposed upon the contending armies made us all eager for an encounter. The river Alle runs thus. [*Drawing a line with the point of his boot.*] The Russians were there. [*Pointing with his foot.*] We here. [*Same movement.*] Contrary to expectations, Benningsen—obviously changing his plans—crossed the Alle and encountered the corps of Lannes here [*pointing with his foot*] on the left bank of the river. A fierce engagement followed, during which Oudinot and his grenadiers performed wonders of valor—never to be equaled, never to be forgotten. Although the entire Russian forces were massed against him, Lannes—tenacious hero that he is!—held his position bravely. Attack upon attack was met, withstood, repulsed. Yet the fate of the day still hung in the balance, and it seemed impossible for our exhausted columns to stand much longer the fierce and ever-recurring onslaught of the enemy, when, suddenly, midst the shouts and huzzahs of the soldiers, the Emperor and his staff galloped on to the battlefield. What a sight! a sight which no mortal tongue can describe—a sight which might have brought envy to the god of war himself! In a moment the scene changed. The presence of the chief gave new hope, renewed courage, to all. The weak grew stronger; the hesitating

waxed determined; even the wounded raised their heads, and seemed to breathe more freely, more hopefully, as their eyes followed the figure on the white charger against the darkening horizon . . . Under orders from the Emperor, Ney made a bold, a wild, dash upon Friedland. The battery of Posthenau thundered—it sounded like the crumbling of the heavens. Brave men were falling fast around us—friends, companions of campaigns of old—yet on we marched where the Emperor had bid us march, protected by the artillery of Victor and assisted by the cavalry of Latour-Marbourg, till, at last, we came face to face with the Imperial Russian Guard. What a charge! What a resistance! What valor! What slaughter! The Russians fought like lions—'twas the courage of despair—and for a moment, terrible moment! it looked as though we should be compelled to fall back, when Dupont's division, arriving in the nick of time, broke through the Russian lines. With the certainty of victory in our hearts, and with shouts of "Long live the Emperor!" we rushed into the burning ruins of Friedland. Night was upon us, and yet the fight continued. The wild cries of the soldiers and the moaning of the wounded mingled with the tramping of the horses and the roar of the cannon. The heavens were illuminated by the fierce conflagration of buildings and bridges. Everywhere could be seen, resplendent and advancing, the victorious Imperial Eagles . . . The Russians were in full retreat; my regiment was following in close pursuit, when suddenly . . .

[*At this moment* VIMONT'S *eyes fell upon* MIRVOISIN, *whose attention had been called by* FRESNEY *to the intensity of expression of old* M. DE LA MARSIGNERIE, *whose interest in the narrative had been worked up to the highest pitch. This caused* MIRVOISIN *to make an effort to suppress laughter, and* VIMONT, *taking this to refer to himself, brings his narrative to an abrupt ending.*]

SEVERAL VOICES.

Continue, General—continue.

VIMONT.

[*Looking fiercely at* MIRVOISIN.] No! . . . [*A pause.*] I should have known better than ever to have commenced . . . I should have known that an armless man could not describe the action of a battle without exposing himself to ridicule.

MIRVOISIN.

Pardon me, General; my laughter was instigated in no way either by your action or by your narrative.

VIMONT.

Indeed! . . . We happen to know for what purpose excuses were made. It is not my first experience. Under my own roof, however, I expected . . .

THE MAYOR.

[*Rushing up to* VIMONT *and then to* MIRVOISIN.]

Permit me in my official capacity . . . Permit me to use my influence . . . Permit me to give my views . . . Permit me . . .

[*No one pays attention to him. There is confusion amongst the guests. Some of them surround* VIMONT *and attempt to explain matters to him in undertones. He seems indisposed to listen. Others* (ALIXE *amongst the number) surround* MIRVOISIN *and beg him not to leave.* VIMONT, *disregarding all explanations, casts an angry glance at* MIRVOISIN *and moves towards the château.* BIRSON, *from his corner, seems to have scored a victory.*]

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

THE THIRD ACT.

THE CHALLENGE.

Time: Evening of Third Day.

Library, as in first act, lighted. The antique arm-chair relegated to a corner. AUDRÉ, *the General's orderly, is standing erect near the door. A servant—a stupid-looking fellow—enters with a bundle of mail. He seems frightened at the rigid, immovable form of the orderly. He looks inquiringly at the latter to ascertain where he is to deposit the bundle he is carrying cautiously before him.*

SERVANT.

[*Standing before the table.*] Here? [*Orderly gives no answer.*] Where?

ORDERLY.

[*In a stentorian voice.*] There!

[*Servant, frightened, drops the mail on the table, and looking one way—at the orderly—moves the other way—to the door.* VIMONT, *in a loose, long garment, like a morning robe. enters. The orderly salutes him. He approaches the table and sees the mail.*]

VIMONT.

Where is Monsieur de Birson?

ORDERLY.

I do not know, General.

VIMONT.

[*Muttering.*] A pity a good man like Birson should be uncle to a laughing idiot like Mirvoisin . . . [*He glances at the bundle of mail on the table—shrugs his shoulders—sits down and gazes at the floor. While in this attitude he is taken with a coughing fit.*] Audré, my tonic. [*Orderly goes to the closet, fills a glass and brings it to the General, holding it up to his mouth.*] No, Audré, that, at least, is something I can do without my hands. Place it on the table. [*Orderly places the glass on the edge of the table and resumes his place near the door.* VIMONT, *sitting down, takes a sip, then walks silently across the room; returns and takes another sip. In his endeavor to empty the glass, it falls to the floor with a crash.*] Another disabled, useless thing in this world!

[VIMONT *stamps his foot and leaves the room. Orderly gets on his knees to pick up the broken pieces. While in that attitude,* BIRSON *enters.*]

BIRSON.

At your evening devotions, Audré?

ORDERLY.

Devotions—no! The General's tonic . . .

BIRSON.

The General's tonic! [*Aside.*] *Malum omen!* [*He goes to the table; looks anxiously over the letters; takes one in his hand and mutters,* "Still unopened." *He is reading the Moniteur when* VIMONT *enters.*] General, I hope you feel rested after this quiet day.

VIMONT.

As rested, I presume, as a man destined to eternal restlessness can ever expect to be . . . [*He makes a sign to orderly to leave the room.*] Ah, Birson, this is a rude awakening from a life-long dream! What a vista lies before me; what a prospect to contemplate: but one life, and that life blasted!

BIRSON.

But, General, do you not believe . . .

VIMONT.

[*With emphasis.*] I believe what I see, what I know . . . What, to me, are vaporous imaginings of things above, of things unseen, unknown, when confronted with such realities as now confront me? Oh, Birson—I am weary of platitudes . . . Some thousand years ago, I'm told, there lived one Belisarius, who, having long served the state and brought laurels to his Emperor, lost both eyes; wherefore I, living some ten centuries later, and having, in the service of my country and my Emperor, lost both arms, have less cause to complain than Belisa-

rius. They bid me compare, and go my way rejoicing. Compare the living with the dead! What are eyes to Belisarius, he moldering in the grave? I live—I live—armless, useless—envying Belisarius his fate. Life is a burden, yet death is denied me. I cannot point a pistol to my brains; I cannot bring poison to my lips; hang—I cannot; drown—some peering fool would rescue me, with a reward in view. Go forth and live; be merry, they say; look for something to distract, to amuse you . . . Where? . . . What? . . .

[*He falls in a seat and gazes vacantly before him.*]

BIRSON.

Believe me, General, you take an unjustifiable view of your condition; and furthermore, I am convinced it will prove ephemeral. When you are more rested, you will feel more cheerful.

VIMONT.

[*Indifferently.*] Maybe—but I doubt it.

BIRSON.

I had proposed, General, giving you an account of what transpired during your absence—a synopsis, so to speak, of your affairs.

VIMONT.

[*Languidly.*] Proceed, Birson—that as well as anything else.

BIRSON.

[*With a satisfied air.*] In the first place, I think it will cause you a lively satisfaction to hear that I have succeeded in finding a purchaser for "Noitiers," which you were anxious to dispose of. [BIRSON *pauses.* VIMONT *nods his head unconcernedly.*] I have invested one hundred and sixty thousand francs in rentes. [BIRSON *pauses.* VIMONT *nods his head.*] Should your revenue and expenditures continue at the same ratio for the next ten or fifteen years, you will be one of the richest men in the department.

VIMONT.

[*Meditatively.*] Yes, Birson, yes . . . but of what avail will it be to me? What can I do with great wealth?

BIRSON.

Great wealth is great power. Of what avail would be the genius, even of a Napoleon, unless he had the wealth of France to back him?

VIMONT.

The Emperor has the use of all his faculties—all his members—whereas I . . .

BIRSON.

You, General, might lose both legs as well as both arms, and, for that matter, both eyes too, provided you had millions at your command

you would be a power in the land. Money—money is king! It is money which maintains armies; it is money which builds navies; it is money which erects palaces; it is money which gives position; yes, and it is money which, in many cases, attracts love . . .

VIMONT.

[*Startled, as though a revelation had been made to him.*] Love! Think you so, Birson?

BIRSON.

I am convinced of it.

VIMONT.

Even in my case?

BIRSON.

Ah, General, it is obvious you are more familiar with the tactics of Mars than with those of Venus. Yours, from early youth, has been the tented field, and not the field of gallantry.

VIMONT.

In either field a man who is armless is disabled.

BIRSON.

If riches cover a multitude of sins, they should have little difficulty covering the absence of arms . . .

VIMONT.

I have seen but one woman with whom I should wish to spend my life . . . and she, I fear, would not care to marry me now. A disarmed soldier falling into the arms of love! . . . Caressing love, armless—what a parody! [*He makes an impatient movement, and then as though to change the subject.*] Birson, oblige me by looking over these letters.

BIRSON.

[*Opening a letter and reading.*] "My dear General, how can I convey to you the expression of my deep regret and sympathy". . .

VIMONT.

[*Impatiently.*] That will do. Try another.

BIRSON.

[*Opening a second letter and reading.*] "My dear General, allow me to assure you that it was with profound emotion" . . .

VIMONT.

Enough—enough! Expressions and emotions will never restore my arms . . .

[EDMOND *enters and holds a card before the General.*]

VIMONT.

[*Reading the card.*] Monsieur Clement . . . I do not know him.

EDMOND.

He begged me to say he was an agent of his Excellency the Minister of Police, and wished to see the General privately.

VIMONT.

Show him in.

[BIRSON *goes out.* EDMOND *ushers in* M. CLEMENT—*a mysterious-looking man.*]

CLEMENT.

[*Looking around.*] We are alone?

VIMONT.

Alone.

CLEMENT.

I am informed you have under your roof a plotter against the government.

VIMONT.

Indeed! His name?

CLEMENT.

Monsieur de Birson.

VIMONT.

And who is your informant?

CLEMENT.

One Armand—until recently employed in your household.

VIMONT.

I do not know for what reason Armand was discharged, but I am convinced that his discharge by Monsieur de Birson is the cause of the present complaint. Monsieur de Birson is no plotter; he is my faithful secretary. His father and mine were friends. It was the memory of this friendship which induced me to give Monsieur de Birson, who was rendered penniless by the Revolution, a position in my household. He fills this position to my satisfaction. Tell you chief that I stand as surety for Monsieur de Birson.

CLEMENT.

Personally I am satisfied with your explanation, which shall be duly reported to headquarters. Good day, General.

VIMONT.

Good day. [CLEMENT *goes out.* VIMONT *calls* BIRSON, *who resumes his seat at the table and looks over the letters.*] Why was Armand discharged?

BIRSON.

For insolence.

VIMONT.

To whom?

BIRSON.

To myself.

VIMONT.

You did well . . . You were reading a letter.

BIRSON.

Yes. [*He picks up an open letter.*] Ah, yes—from Jamont. [*He reads.*] "It seems years since the last campaign, but the success of the Emperor is destined to awaken the jealousy of the powers. They will combine and attack him, in the hope of recovering what they have lost—and will lose still more" . . .

VIMONT.

[*Interrupting.*] Jamont is not only a good soldier, but a good prophet . . . From whom is that letter near your hand?

BIRSON.

[*Opening envelope and glancing over letter.*] Here, indeed, is a strange letter. [*Reads.*] "Welcome home, brave soldier, to the peaceful home of your childhood, though peaceful to you I fear it will never prove hereafter. As a warrior you had no rival; as a lover you have a dangerous one. Beware of him. He will burden you with professions of friendship; but the same mellifluous tones which dwell on amity for you breathe, the next moment, passion for one you love. He had his doubts, but now that you are disarmed,

he is confident of victory, and proclaims you *hors de combat* in more ways than one. Have an eye on him, and, before too late, regain the ground you have lost through absence. A Friend."

VIMONT.

It is as I expected—as was inevitable.

BIRSON.

[*Perplexed.*] What can this mean?

VIMONT.

Mean? [*He hesitates a moment.*] You are an old friend, Birson, and I may safely unbosom myself to you. This letter means that the last thread which held me to earth is snapped.

BIRSON.

I do not understand.

VIMONT.

You know Mademoiselle de Marot?

BIRSON.

Yes—she was here yesterday—a marvel of grace and beauty.

VIMONT.

[*Muttering.*] Madeleine . . . Madeleine . . . [*Then turning to* BIRSON.] I knew her, Birson,

when she was a child—a sweet, loving child. I watched her grow and develop into maidenhood. I was present on the occasion—the eventful occasion—when, casting aside her girlish dress, she donned woman's attire. Ah! well do I remember the night—the night of her first ball. How proud I was to lead her to the dance—a hundred envious eyes following me. These were sweet memories, Birson, which cheered me during weary marches in the cold northern climes; which haunted me in the stillness of the night, when the camp was asleep; yes, and flashed across my mind, anon and again, in the heat of battle . . . There is no soldier, Birson, however fierce he be, who has not in him some bit of sentiment. That was mine, and I have been robbed of it.

BIRSON.

Ah! I begin to understand . . . I perceive a clue.

VIMONT.

A clue to what?

BIRSON.

To something I overheard last night.

VIMONT.

And what was that?

BIRSON.

[*Hesitating.*] On reflection, it is not worth repeating—an idle yarn, no doubt.

VIMONT.

An idle yarn which may interest me . . .

BIRSON.

Which may afflict you.

VIMONT.

One affliction more or less, after the many I have suffered, signifies little. To the point, Birson.

BIRSON.

But, General, I am convinced it was not uttered seriously—a yarn, believe me, nothing more.

VIMONT.

[*With authority.*] Let us admit it to be a yarn and nothing more, and relate it to me.

[*Interest should be given to the following scene by the contrast between the calm, deliberate manner of* BIRSON *and the excited, passionate manner of* VIMONT.]

BIRSON.

But, General . . .

VIMONT.

Speak.

BIRSON.

Since you command, I shall obey, and relate what I heard, word for word.

VIMONT.

Word for word.

BIRSON.

Well—I was alone in a room adjoining one where several gentlemen were drinking and conversing. The door was partly open. I paid little attention to what was said till I heard your name mentioned, and, being interested in all that concerns you, I listened . . .

[*He hesitates.*]

VIMONT.

Proceed.

BIRSON.

First promise me, General, that no matter what comes of this, you will never repeat it to mortal soul—never mention my name in connection with it.

VIMONT.

On my word, as a soldier.

BIRSON.

This is what I overheard: "Vimont marry! What can one conceive more ludicrous? An innocent bride—an armless man! Vimont, who has studied strategy, should understand this."

VIMONT.

Were those his words?

BIRSON.

His very words.

VIMONT.

And what else, pray?

BIRSON.

"Why—he would require a nurse—a nurse to bathe him—a nurse to dress him—a nurse to feed him—a nurse to . . . to do everything for him," and then laughing: "The idea of *starting* married life with a nurse!"

VIMONT.

The miserable cur! He shall pay dearly for his insolence. Who is the man, Birson, who dared speak of me thus?

BIRSON.

I beg of you, General, for your sake and mine, do not insist.

VIMONT.

I must know. Speak!

BIRSON.

Alas! I have already spoken too much. I cannot mention his name.

VIMONT.

I insist. If you have my interest at heart, you will not hesitate.

BIRSON.

My interest in you has, I fear, betrayed the interest I have in one who is, or was, dear to me.

VIMONT.

[*Looking earnestly at* BIRSON.] Can it be Mirvoisin? [BIRSON *is silent.*] Is it Mirvoisin? [BIRSON *hangs his head.*] It is Mirvoisin! . . . Oh! how clear it all appears to me now. That prearranged meeting on the terrace—those whisperings in the corner—those exchanges of mysterious glances—and finally the open insult; mocking me in my own house! . . . and this letter. [*Looking at the open letter.*] He shall make amends for this. I will . . . [*He stops suddenly, hesitates, and then with a painful expression on his face, and a sadness in his voice.*] But, Birson, what can I do? What shall I do? . . . I cannot strike him . . . I cannot challenge him . . . Oh, what a helpless wretch I am! What right have I to live, if I must live and be mocked with impunity; if I need must face an insolent cur, and yet not be able to strike him? [*Appealingly.*] Surely, Birson, some means can be devised—some means must be devised—to chastise such as he.

BIRSON.

It is an unfortunate, a provoking, a perplexing case . . .

VIMONT.

Here I stand, grievously offended, and yet un-

able to secure amends, to inflict punishment. I am denied even that satisfaction which is accorded a woman—a duel by proxy. Who, on this broad earth, would offer to fight for me—to defend my honor—to avenge this insult? On whom have I sufficient claim to ask that he risk his life in my behalf?

BIRSON.

[*Meditatively. His chin resting on his hand.*] Perplexing . . . perplexing . . . You have no friend you could appeal to?

VIMONT.

My friends are far away—in the army; those here are also friends of his—more so, perhaps, than mine.

BIRSON.

[*Still meditatively.*] Let me see . . . Let me see . . . Ah! I have an idea—while fighting by proxy may be out of the question in your case, shaking dice by proxy is not necessarily so.

VIMONT.

[*Eagerly.*] And the loser blows out his brains!

BIRSON.

Precisely—provided the loser be not yourself.

VIMONT.

In which eventuality poison will do the work.

Birson, this must be settled without delay. Send at once to Maupert and Beaumont and tell them I wish to see them—the sooner, the better.

BIRSON.

Reflect, General. Supposing the dice should turn against you?

VIMONT.

That is not the point. I am determined—go. [BIRSON *withdraws, and returns instantly.*] What is it?

BIRSON.

The seconds will wish to know the cause of the challenge.

VIMONT.

Well—is not the cause sufficient?

BIRSON.

Amply so—but how can you name the cause without naming me?

VIMONT.

Why not name you?

BIRSON.

You gave me your word, General—your word as a soldier.

VIMONT.

True—I did. A soldier must keep his word; I shall keep mine. But, Birson, a cause for the

challenge—a cause must be found . . . the letter?

BIRSON.

The letter bears no name; it mentions no name.

VIMONT.

And his insult on the terrace, when he laughed in my face?

BIRSON.

That might be deemed insufficient cause.

VIMONT.

But what if *I* deem it sufficient cause?

BIRSON.

The seconds might disagree on that point.

VIMONT.

I shall give them no opportunity to disagree. They may think what they wish of his action—so may I—and I propose to resent it. I shall crowd him, trip him, heap insult upon him, and thus compel him to challenge me.

BIRSON.

Ah—there indeed you would have him cornered.

VIMONT.

Yes, cornered, and no escape. Go, Birson, let

no time be lost. Send word to Beaumont and Maupert, while I seek Mirvoisin.

[BIRSON *goes out by one door.* VIMONT *is about to leave by another, when he meets* ALIXE *entering.*]

VIMONT.

[*Astonished.*] Alixe!

ALIXE.

[*Joyously.*] Eugene, I am here to tell you of a delightful plan I have formed for to-morrow. Lestrange has been in the tower and consulted the heavens. He has scanned the horizon; he has studied the four points of the compass, and he predicts for to-morrow a sun of Austerlitz. We are to drive to the old castle near Moisart; we shall lunch under the trees, and linger there till twilight.

VIMONT.

I trust Lestrange has made no blunder.

ALIXE.

He is not infallible, and yet he seldom errs . . . You will accompany us, will you not, Eugene?

VIMONT.

[*After a moment's hesitation.*] No, Alixe; go without me—amuse yourselves.

ALIXE.

[*With a disappointed air.*] But we will not go without you. The party is already made up. The Marsigneries are going—the Marcourts—Eugenie de Vitoy—and [*eyeing him without his perceiving it*] Madeleine de Marot—and [*with hesitancy*] Monsieur de Mirvoisin . . . [*At the mention of the two last names together* VIMONT *betrays intense emotion.*] What is it, Eugene?

VIMONT.

Nothing—only I shall not be of the party.

ALIXE.

[*Anxiously.*] There is something the matter with you . . . [*He is silent.*] Tell me—what is it? [*He continues silent.*] I must know . . .

VIMONT.

You will know to-morrow.

ALIXE.

[*Seizing the lapel of his coat.*] No—now, now!

VIMONT.

If you must know, then listen: Monsieur de Mirvoisin shall be called to account for his . . . insulting manner.

ALIXE.

What—yesterday on the terrace? Why, he

himself told me that he laughed at Monsieur de la Marsignerie, who was so excited at your description of Friedland, that he thought his eyes would drop from his head.

VIMONT.

It is all very well for him to say that now, but I happen to know that his feelings towards me are far from being friendly.

ALIXE.

[*With emphasis.*] I cannot believe he harbors aught against you.

VIMONT.

[*With greater emphasis.*] You cannot—but I can.

ALIXE.

Well, supposing he does, what will you do?

VIMONT.

Challenge him.

ALIXE.

[*Amazed.*] Challenge him! But how will you fight?

VIMONT.

The dice will decide our fate.

ALIXE.

[*Collapsing.*] And mine! [*She checks herself—pauses—approaches* VIMONT.] Eugene, do you know that Monsieur de Mirvoisin . . .

VIMONT.

[*Interrupting.*] I know that Monsieur de Mirvoisin is an insolent cur, and he or I shall pay . . . [ALIXE, *as though stunned, brings her hands to her temples, reels, and falls in a chair.* VIMONT *kneels at her side, calls her by name, kisses her hand. She makes a vain movement to loosen her robe at the neck, and gasps,* "Air, air." VIMONT *rushes to the window, and on realizing that he cannot open it, assumes a despairing attitude. Then he leans against the window with all his weight, and this proving futile, he batters it with his shoulder till it falls with a crash. Several of the servants, hearing the crashing of the window, appear at the various doorways.* VIMONT *turns fiercely towards them.*] What are you doing here? Who called you? Who needs you? I am not quite as weak as a crawling infant, or as helpless as a palsied octogenerian. When I require your assistance I shall cause you to be notified. [*Servants go out.* ALIXE *recovers slowly.* VIMONT *stands at her side, looking at her anxiously. Then he speaks in a low, affectionate voice.*] I am sorry I caused you pain . . . I did not mean to . . . Forgive me, Alixe . . . You know my affection for you . . . Come, be yourself again . . . Embrace me with those fond arms of yours . . .

[*She rises and embraces him.*]

ALIXE.

Promise me, Eugene . . .

[EDMOND *enters.*]

EDMOND.

General, a messenger from Paris wishes to see you alone.

[VIMONT *goes out, followed by* EDMOND. ALIXE *alone, seated in a chair; her hands clasped; her eyes fixed steadily before her.*]

ALIXE.

My joy was too great . . . It could not last . . . [*Her face lights up.*] If I were to tell him? . . . [*Despairingly.*] He would remind me of my promise; he would accuse me of loving his enemy. [BIRSON *enters.* ALIXE *rises and goes forth to meet him.*] Monsieur de Birson, lend me your hand, for mine is chained, powerless; lend me your mind, for mine is clouded, confused.

BIRSON.

My hand, my mind, are yours, Mademoiselle, . . . [*he approaches her and half whispers*] likewise my heart.

ALIXE.

[*Drawing back with suppressed emotion.*] I appealed to you, as a friend, for assistance, and you compel me to withdraw my appeal.

BIRSON.

[*Kneeling.*] On bended knee, I beg you . . .

ALIXE.

[*In despair.*] Spare me!

BIRSON.

[*Rising.*] Pardon me, Mademoiselle, for assuming to . . . [ALIXE *rushes from the room. He bows to the door, which closes in his face.*] The fair Amarinta and the faithful Luigi are not on encouraging terms . . . Ugh! Failure to-day may mean success to-morrow. [*He meditates.*] She would have me stop this duel . . . [*Pause.*] Stop this duel—why? It might serve her purpose, not mine . . . [*Pause.*] Stop the duel—why? Whoever loses, I win. If Mirvoisin, he will be well out of the way; if Vimont, would she dare marry Mirvoisin, who caused her brother's death? [*Triumphantly.*] Let the duel proceed!

[VIMONT *enters.*]

VIMONT.

I am called to Paris, but I shall not leave till I have settled matters with Mirvoisin.

BIRSON.

[*Affecting despondency.*] General, I wish I had not spoken.

VIMONT.

Speaking as you did was rendering me a service; and while I think of it, Birson—who knows what may happen?—I wish to make an alteration in my will . . . You will find in the left upper drawer of my desk a bunch of keys. Bring them here. [BIRSON *goes out. He returns with the keys.*] Remove that cabinet. [*Indicating a*

piece of furniture against the wall, which BIRSON *moves with difficulty,* VIMONT *assisting with his shoulder.*] Take the large key and open that door. [*A door concealed behind the cabinet.*] Take out the strong box to the right . . . Open it. The key? Let me see . . . [BIRSON *holds up each key in turn.*] That one . . . [BIRSON *opens box.*] You will find a sealed envelope marked "Last Testament."

[BIRSON, *on his knees, looks carefully over the papers and objects in the strong box. While doing this he lays hand on a miniature of* MADELEINE. *Still kneeling before the box, he holds the miniature up to the light and contemplates it earnestly.* VIMONT, *embarrassed, watches him from the rear.*]

BIRSON.

[*With uncertainty.*] This looks like Mademoiselle . . . de Marot.

VIMONT.

[*With emotion.*] It is Mademoiselle de Marot.

BIRSON.

[*Deliberately.*] Shall I replace it in the box?

VIMONT.

No—give it to me. [BIRSON, *absent-minded, and looking in the box, stretches his hand, which holds the miniature, towards* VIMONT. *The latter*

looks distressed as he realizes he cannot take it.] Birson, place it on the mantel. [Birson *rises and moves slowly towards the mantel, where he places the miniature,* Vimont *following him with his eyes.* Birson *returns to the box, before which he kneels, and continues the search of the will. He examines a number of papers, and finally holds up a large envelope to* Vimont.] Yes—that is it. I'll dictate my wishes, which you will convey to Monsieur Corvin, my notary, and ask him to incorporate them in my will, in due legal form. [Birson *sits at the table, prepared to write.* Vimont *walks the floor nervously and then stops to dictate.*] I bequeath to Jean Gabriel Antoine—son of my father's old friend, the Count de Birson—as a token of my appreciation of his constant and faithful services, my signet ring and the sum of . . . [*a pause*] one hundred thousand francs . . .

Birson.

But, General . . .

Vimont.

We shall not discuss the question now. Go, Birson—see that those matters which press are attended to. [Birson, *with a resigned air, withdraws.* Vimont, *alone, stands for a moment, gazing at the floor. Then he raises his eyes and fixes them on the miniature of* Madeleine. *He approaches nearer and nearer to the mantel, till he stands close to the miniature, on which his eyes remain riveted. He speaks tenderly at first.*] Yes

—you are beautiful . . . but beauty, like all else in life, will fade . . . youth and grace will disappear . . . Your body, which I once deemed sweet, will be cold and lifeless . . . a feast for worms . . . [*His voice vibrates with passion.*] That will be . . . that must be . . . but now—now! it is arms you crave for . . . arms to embrace you . . . arms to encircle your waist . . . arms . . . arms . . . You shall have them . . . [*with emphasis*] PERHAPS . . . [*With bitterness.*] But they will weary of you, these arms—it is so written—and seek elsewhere. Your dream of happiness will vanish . . . as did my dream of happiness . . . You will, as I do, know loneliness. Then—yes, then—you will think of the days of old, which now you have forgotten—but too late—too late! Go from my thoughts, my life; go to that other's arms . . . arms . . . arms . . .

[*He makes an impulsive movement with his head to dash the miniature from the mantel. He fails. He makes a second attempt. He fails again. He looks around the room, as though seeking assistance. He tries once more, and the miniature falls to the floor. He is in the act of raising his foot to crush it, when the door opens and* EDMOND *enters.*]

EDMOND.

The Marquis de Mirvoisin wishes to see the General.

VIMONT.

[*Astonished.*] The Marquis de Mirvoisin! [*Pause.*] I'll see the Marquis.

[EDMOND *goes out.* VIMONT *faces the door, at a distance. A moment later the door is opened by* EDMOND, *who withdraws immediately.* MIRVOISIN *enters briskly and advances towards* VIMONT, *with a smile on his lips, but, on perceiving the menacing attitude of* VIMONT, *he stops short, and for a few seconds the two men, erect, with heads thrown back, gaze at each other silently. Determination is on the face of* VIMONT; *uncertainty on that of* MIRVOISIN.]

MIRVOISIN.

General, I have come . . . [*a pause*] I intended coming . . . to see you, to explain the little incident of the terrace.

VIMONT.

Indeed! Well, I beg to assure you, sir, that you will have difficulty—great difficulty—explaining what you are pleased to call the little incident of the terrace.

MIRVOISIN.

[*Assuming the haughty demeanor of* VIMONT.] Your manner takes me by surprise, General. I fail to understand what you mean.

VIMONT.

[*Moving towards* MIRVOISIN.] I'll tell you what I mean—you are a miserable cur—and not having a hand with which to slap your face, take that— [*He spits in his face.* MIRVOISIN, *with clenched fist, makes a movement to strike* VIMONT—*but stops suddenly, making a visible effort to control himself. A moment of silence, during which the two men stare angrily at each other.*]

MIRVOISIN.

I do not wish to be misunderstood. You have insulted me mortally. If I do not resent it, it is that I feel I have undue advantage over you.

VIMONT.

[*With disdain.*] Subterfuge!

MIRVOISIN.

Subterfuge—no! My honor forbids my resenting the insult of an armless man, as it would forbid my resenting that of a woman.

VIMONT.

Oh, this is not the first time you have harped on my misfortune; but, let me inform you, sir—to relieve your delicate sense of honor, or any superfluous scrupulousness on your part—that though I am armless, and more defenseless than a woman, there is, unless you be an arrant coward, a means whereby you may obtain satisfaction for the insult I have offered you.

L. of C.

MIRVOISIN.

I shall welcome any means that may be suggested to avenge my honor, even though the suggestion come from him who has wronged me.

VIMONT.

Since, as you observed, you have undue advantage over me; since I cannot fight, nor induce anyone to fight for me—let dice decide our fate. Here, at least, I can secure a proxy; here we meet on equal ground.

MIRVOISIN.

So be it.

VIMONT.

Should you lose, you blow out your miserable brains; should I . . . poison will end my life.

MIRVOISIN.

So be it.

VIMONT.

This evening our seconds meet; to-morrow you and I meet.

MIRVOISIN.

So be it . . . Till then, General. [*He bows low and withdraws.*]

END OF THE THIRD ACT.

THE FOURTH ACT.

THE DUEL.

Time: Morning of Fourth Day.

Large room in MIRVOISIN'S *château. Ancestral pictures, armor, tapestries, etc.* MIRVOISIN *and* SELLIER *enter.*

MIRVOISIN.

This is the chamber—the chamber where, in years gone by, many similar affairs, but none so sad, have been discussed, arranged. But why, Sellier, was it decided that it should be held under my roof, not his?

SELLIER.

Because under his own roof Vimont fears interruption, if not more serious interference in the matter.

MIRVOISIN.

Ah, Sellier, how uncertain are human affairs —how ephemeral our prospects of happiness! Yesterday I still indulged the dream that Alixe might be my bride, and Vimont my brother; to-day my dream has vanished—Vimont and I meet, not as brothers, but as enemies.

SELLIER.

Yes, 'tis sad, Mirvoisin—and the sadder that I am convinced there is a misunderstanding.

MIRVOISIN.

A misunderstanding beyond peradventure—but one which he will not admit of—will not even discuss.

SELLIER.

He is bent on carrying out the programme, and dismisses all explanations as an effort to trick him into surrendering his position.

MIRVOISIN.

And I—so long as he refuses an apology—am compelled to maintain my position.

SELLIER.

Yes—there is no escape. He has created an impasse. He threatens—should you refuse to resent this insult—to repeat it, and repeat it, till you do.

MIRVOISIN.

Is there—in this broad world—anything more difficult to deal with than sensitiveness such as his? Put me face to face with a tiger, and I should know what to do; with a madman; but with one of your . . .

SELLIER.

Never mind, Mirvoisin—calm yourself. Let us hope victory will be on your side.

MIRVOISIN.

An unwelcome victory that which will make her, whom I love most, unhappy—nay, will cause us to remain strangers forever.

[*A servant enters.*]

SERVANT.

There is a lady who insists on seeing Monsieur le Marquis.

MIRVOISIN.

Her name?

SERVANT.

She refuses to give it, Monsieur le Marquis.

MIRVOISIN.

Let the lady enter. [*Servant goes out.*] Who can my mysterious visitor be? Sellier, will you see that my pistols are in good order? [SELLIER *withdraws.* ALIXE, *with cloak and hat to disguise her, enters.* MIRVOISIN *bows, with an air of uncertainty.*] Whom have I the honor of saluting? [ALIXE *slowly casts aside her disguise.*] Alixe! you here?

ALIXE.

Yes, driven hither by despair—by hope. Oh, Roger, this meeting must be stopped.

MIRVOISIN.

[*Taking her hands.*] You know, Alixe, that it pains me no less than it does you. Have you seen him?

ALIXE.

I have begged and implored on bended knee; he caresses, but will not answer me, and you—have you done nothing?

MIRVOISIN.

All that lay in my power. I have done, in his case, what I should have done in the case of no other man. I have offered to apologize for the imaginary offense of which I am accused, provided he apologize for the actual insult he proffered me.

ALIXE.

And his answer was?

MIRVOISIN.

That he would neither accept nor offer an apology.

ALIXE.

And you will meet him?

MIRVOISIN.

[*Despairingly.*] What else can I do?

ALIXE.

Refuse to see him.

MIRVOISIN.

He threatens, in that event, to heap insult upon insult till I be compelled to resent them.

ALIXE.

Flee, then.

MIRVOISIN.

And leave behind that without which I could not live—my love and my honor.

ALIXE.

Conceal yourself; assume indisposition.

MIRVOISIN.

To what purpose?

ALIXE.

The encounter would be avoided.

MIRVOISIN.

It would be but postponed.

ALIXE.

I shall tell him we are betrothed.

MIRVOISIN.

It would aggravate his animosity, since you would thereby confess you had broken your pledge to him.

ALIXE.

What, then, am I to do? I appeal to you in vain; I appeal to him in vain. Oh, heavens! was woman ever placed in such a plight—to have her heart torn in twain by her brother and her lover?

MIRVOISIN.

[*Takes her hand. After a pause.*] If you will make a sacrifice, Alixe, I shall.

ALIXE.

What do you mean?

MIRVOISIN.

I shall consider Vimont as having won, and pay the penalty of defeat.

ALIXE.

[*Clinging to him.*] Never!

MIRVOISIN.

But should Vimont lose?

ALIXE.

He must not lose.

MIRVOISIN.

Yet one of us . . .

ALIXE.

No—neither of you . . . [*Distractedly.*] Where do you meet?

MIRVOISIN.

[*Embarrassed.*] Where do we meet? Wherever Vimont decides.

ALIXE.

And that is?

MIRVOISIN.

You know how erratic he is. He has decided that the meeting shall take place; it is for him to decide where.

ALIXE.

When is it to be?

MIRVOISIN.

[*Perplexed.*] When? [*Pause.*] Ah, Alixe, ask me not what I cannot tell you.

ALIXE.

[*Looking at him appealingly and, for a moment, silently.*] Then you will do nothing for me?

MIRVOISIN.

I'll give my life for you.

ALIXE.

It would be taking mine.

MIRVOISIN.

I'll give . . .

ALIXE.

You will give everything except that which I ask.

MIRVOISIN.

[*Reproachfully.*] Alixe!

ALIXE.

Instead of a wedding, it will be a funeral; instead of the bridal veil, I shall wear the veil of crape.

MIRVOISIN.

Alixe!

ALIXE.

Let the dice perform their mournful task! Avenge your injured honor! Invoke chance—as surely as it will spare one of you, so surely will it strike me . . .

[ALIXE *makes a rapid movement towards the door, but is intercepted by* MIRVOISIN.]

MIRVOISIN.

Do not, I implore you, leave me thus.

ALIXE.

It is you who will it.

MIRVOISIN.

Far from it! It is a fate I would crush that wills it . . . But since we must part, Alixe, at least let us part as friends . . . Oh, how I remember the endless days spent in sadness—sadness which sprung from doubt of your sentiments towards me. How I remember, Alixe, those short, happy hours—happy because doubt had vanished, and our hearts knew each other's secret. How I remember, Alixe, that supreme moment when, for the first time . . .

[*He presses her in his arms.*]

ALIXE.

And I, too, remember—and my remembrance is sweeter than yours, since I would have those happy hours continue—whereas you . . .

MIRVOISIN.

Alas! their memory embitters the prospect of losing them.

ALIXE.

Listen, Roger; my love for Eugene is more intense than your hate of him. If I sacrifice the greater, you might sacrifice the lesser. I should rather incur his eternal resentment than follow his dear body to the grave; I should rather . . .

[*She checks herself and lowers her eyes.*]

MIRVOISIN.

What is it, Alixe?

ALIXE.

[*Hesitating.*] You force me to utter pleadings that should come from your lips.

MIRVOISIN.

Coming from yours, they will prove more irresistible.

ALIXE.

[*Betraying deep emotion.*] Will you leave this place if I leave it with you? [*She seizes his hand.*] Let us fly, Roger—let us fly to a land far away—from strife and from anger, to peace and to love . . . [*She pauses.*] You are silent . . . you hesitate . . .

[*She draws herself back, assumes an injured look, then, with majestic dignity, moves to the door. He follows her, calling,* "Alixe, Alixe"—*but her manner forbids further interference. She glides silently out of the room.* SELLIER *enters, carrying the box of dueling pistols. He places it on the table.* MIRVOISIN *opens the box, and with a calm—half-mocking, half-serious—look, takes one of the pistols in his hand, examines it, and tests the trigger.*]

SELLIER.

I have fulfilled the duty imposed on me. May

these [*pointing to the pistols*] not be called upon to perform theirs.

MIRVOISIN.

I ask myself whether, after all, Sellier, it is not as well to go this way as any other—now as well as later. The time must come, and in a hundred years . . .

SELLIER.

To-morrow you will not speak thus.

MIRVOISIN.

[*With a bitter smile.*] Perhaps not.

[*A servant enters.*]

SERVANT.

The Abbot of Narmontier.

[MIRVOISIN *makes an impatient movement.* SELLIER *withdraws to one side and stands leaning against the back of a chair. The Abbot—a venerable man—enters.*]

ABBOT.

Benedicite—In nomine Patri, et Filii, et Spiritu Sancto.

MIRVOISIN.

Welcome, reverend father. To what good grace am I indebted for this unexpected visit?

ABBOT.

It is the mission of the holy Church to maintain peace amongst men.

MIRVOISIN.

The holy Church has a difficult mission at this moment, with Napoleon in the field.

ABBOT.

The ways of Providence are manifold. Napoleon serves as a means, and still more will he serve as a moral. Who breaks the peace shall, in his time, suffer defeat.

MIRVOISIN.

Meanwhile victory follows the martial eagles . . .

ABBOT.

Hush! History is of all time, and we see but the present . . . My son, it was not of Napoleon —may Heaven have mercy on his soul—but of yourself that I came to speak.

MIRVOISIN.

My services have not yet been called into requisition—I am still a man of peace.

ABBOT.

[*Approaching him with a mysterious air.*] You indulge, this day, in an unholy contest . . .

MIRVOISIN.

Father . . .

ABBOT.

I know all . . . I come, in the name of the great Father above, and in the name of your honored sire, whose confidence and friendship in God I enjoyed to his last breath, to enjoin you from carrying out your nefarious purpose.

MIRVOISIN.

[*Perplexed.*] How came you, holy father, who live within cloistered walls, to learn of unholy worldly doings?

ABBOT.

The Lord is almighty, and where his own glory and man's welfare are concerned, he spares not his might.

MIRVOISIN.

Well, father, your time, I know, is precious; and mine, I fear, is short. [*He looks at the clock.*] I shall be brief and frank. Your informant, whether voice of earth or spirit of heaven, is well informed. I am about to engage in an unholy and, I do sincerely believe, a most unjustifiable contest; you are not more anxious than I, myself, to prevent it—but it lay not in our power . . .

ABBOT.

Heaven above . . .

MIRVOISIN.

You speak of heaven . . . I bow my head—not only heaven above, but heaven on earth itself, was risked by me, when I picked up the glove that was cast defiantly at my feet. It was not of my doing, father, nor is it subject to my undoing. It was forced upon me, and however I abhor it, being in it, I shall see it to the end.

ABBOT.

But, my son . . .

MIRVOISIN.

But, father, believe me—this is beyond your power and mine. Your thought is the same as mine; your wish the same; yet you and I can do nothing—but submit.

ABBOT.

By the memory of all you hold sacred, I conjure you . . .

MIRVOISIN.

[*Impatiently.*] Pray, father, retire . . . [*Looking at the clock.*] In five minutes they will be here.

ABBOT.

Confess, my son . . .

MIRVOISIN.

There is time, good father. This is to be a

trial by jury. The verdict precedes execution. Between the two there will be room for confession.

ABBOT.

The Lord have mercy on your soul. [MIRVOISIN *kneels; the Abbot blesses him.*] I shall not be far—send for me, my son.

[*Abbot goes out, followed by* SELLIER. BIRSON *enters, carrying a small bag.*]

MIRVOISIN.

Good morning to you, esteemed uncle. By the way, your prognostications of the other day are not verified.

BIRSON.

[*Placing the bag on the table.*] In what respect?

MIRVOISIN.

The cannon's day never came. Vimont lives, and is still bent on fighting . . . in his own peculiar way.

BIRSON.

A rather solemn occasion for you to indulge in your own peculiar humor.

MIRVOISIN.

[*With disdain.*] Think you so, esteemed uncle? What have you in that bag?

BIRSON.

[*Embarrassed.*] Nothing much—a thing or two the General may require.

MIRVOISIN.

Ah—ah—I see! What a type of the traditional preacher you are!

BIRSON.

[*Sarcastically.*] What does the oracle mean?

MIRVOISIN.

This—that you, the most fervent of Royalist preachers, have gone over [*tapping his bag*], bag and baggage, to the Bonapartist camp.

BIRSON.

Listen, Roger, listen . . .

MIRVOISIN.

[*Moving to the door.*] Listen to more of your moral preaching? No, uncle, not now. The moment is inopportune—I have other matters to attend to.

[MIRVOISIN *goes out.* BIRSON, *alone, opens the bag and takes out a small phial. He examines it closely.*]

BIRSON.

Guaranteed effective—beyond the recourse of

medicine. [*He replaces the phial in the bag, and takes out a box of dice, which he shakes hurriedly and throws the dice on the table.*] Vimont, three duces—good! [*Shakes the box and throws the dice again.*] Mirvoisin, two fives—and nothing more—he loses!

[Mirvoisin *enters, accompanied by his seconds. They look at the clock. It strikes eleven, in deep sonorous tones. All are silent. At the last stroke* Vimont *and his seconds are announced.* Vimont *acts with suppressed excitement and speaks with forced calmness.*]

Vimont.

Is everything ready, Birson?

Birson.

So far as I am concerned, all is ready, General.

[Mirvoisin *stands on one side of the table,* Vimont *on the other, as though eager to test the dice. The four seconds group themselves at a distance and are engaged in an animated discussion.* Birson *stands alone, apparently indifferent to the issue.*]

Vimont.

Gentlemen, Monsieur de Birson has consented to act as my proxy. [Birson *offers the box of dice to* Mirvoisin, *who, with an air of deference, hands it back to* Birson. *The latter, eagerly watched by*

all, who have approached the table, shakes the box violently and throws the dice.] Three fives!

[MIRVOISIN *takes the box and is in the act of shaking it, when one of his seconds steps up.*]

CHARTIER.

This is irregular. The dice have not been examined; the signal has not been given.

VIMONT.

There are the dice; examine them. We await the signal.

[*The seconds withdraw to a corner, and once more indulge in a discussion.*]

LATOUR.

[*Addressing* VIMONT *and* MIRVOISIN.] I am compelled to inform you, gentlemen, that while we came to a conclusion last evening, we are far from agreeing this morning.

VIMONT.

In what respect?

LATOUR.

Monsieur Chartier and I are of the opinion that there is something unmanly, nay, repellant, in leaving to the cast of a die the lives of two brave men.

VIMONT.

And I am of the opinion that this is a prepared plan—a trick—a trick, I say—to interfere with my securing satisfaction from this man [*turning fiercely to* MIRVOISIN].

CHARTIER.

You seem to forget, General Vimont, that you are the challenged party.

LATOUR.

Believe me, General, there is no desire on our part to deprive you or the Marquis of the means of securing satisfaction.

VIMONT.

[*With emphasis.*] Then carry out the programme agreed upon.

CHARTIER.

Monsieur Latour and I do not consider that programme satisfactory.

VIMONT.

Then suggest a better one.

LATOUR.

Remember, General, the Emperor's aversion to duels. "Good duelist, poor soldier"—is one of his axioms.

VIMONT.

A good duelist I can never be; a poor soldier I am doomed to be always. But that is not the point. We have met here for a specific purpose. Let us carry out that purpose.

LATOUR.

But, General, while we are here for a specific purpose, and while we all agree, more or less, that the purpose is not inconsistent with your sense of honor, or our sense of duty in the premises, we differ widely as to the propriety of satisfying that purpose in the manner referred to.

CHARTIER.

While I know I am not expressing Monsieur de Mirvoisin's wishes, I am convinced that, if free from passion, he would agree with Monsieur Latour and myself that the vindication of a man's honor should depend, not upon the cast of a die, but upon a test of superior strength or skill.

VIMONT.

That is your opinion—very well—I shall accept it as though my own. Vindication shall depend upon a test of superior strength or skill. Tie the Marquis's wrists behind his back. Thus he will have no advantage over me. Draw three parallel lines—ten, twenty, thirty feet apart, one here, one there, one there. We shall meet at the central line—face to face, chest to chest. He

who shall, twice out of three times, force his adversary to the further line, shall be victorious. If the Marquis, poison shall end my life; if I, he shall blow out his brains.

LATOUR.

[*Addressing his colleague.*] He is bent on fighting.

VIMONT.

I am bent on settling this matter, now and on this spot.

MIRVOISIN.

[*Calmly.*] The suggestion of the General meets with my approval.

[*The seconds confer for a few moments.*]

LATOUR.

[*Addressing his colleagues, but loud enough to be overheard.*] With all respect to the General, the proposition he has made, however ingenious, is impracticable.

VIMONT.

[*With passion.*] It is not impracticable! And even if it were a hundred times less so, you would still object—it is your game, your plan. Dice were decided upon, and objections were brought forth because our fate was to be left to chance. It was claimed that strength and skill were required. I now suggest something wherein strength and skill will be brought into play, and still you object.

LATOUR.

Personally, I object, because it would be converting an affair of honor—a most serious matter—into a farce. A case of this nature can only be settled by fighting—with swords or pistols.

VIMONT.

The time was when there were no swords, no pistols, yet men fought.

LATOUR.

True—but they had fists.

VIMONT.

Animals fight, and they have no fists. If, as you insist, a duel should be a test of strength between adversaries, what matters it whether the issue be decided by means of pistols, swords, fists, horns, teeth, or chests?

LATOUR.

It matters this much: that one is recognized as civilized, the other as barbarous.

VIMONT.

Recognized—but on what grounds, by what right? The vain subtilities of custom, the inconsistent regulation of nations! I have seen men killed in my day—by the hundred, by the thousand. I have galloped over battlefields covered

with slain. They were dead—dead—quite dead. What mattered it to them what killed them—balls, swords, bayonets, arrows, blows? Life was gone—gone beyond recourse; gone without their help, without their will; taken from them by the enemy. And you talk of civilized methods! The barbarian kills his man; so do we. What he does is barbarous; what we do is civilized. In either case the man is killed. Does the method employed make any difference to the man who is slain? Does it increase or diminish his chances of coming to life again? Does it relieve the man who killed him from the responsibility of his act? Throw poisoned food to the bird, or shatter its wings as it flies across the azure sky, does not the bird die? and are you not the cause of its death? Bah! Talk not to me of your civilized and your barbarous methods! Man may recognize what he pleases, resort to any distinctions, any niceties, he chooses—but in either case his nature remains the same, his purpose the same, the result the same.

[*The seconds look at each other, perplexed, amazed.* MIRVOISIN *stands immovable, his eyes riveted on* VIMONT.]

LATOUR.

Pardon me, General; there is a difference between what you suggest and the accepted form of duel . . .

VIMONT.

[*Interrupting.*] A difference, if you will—but

no greater than that existing between a duel with swords and one with pistols.

CHARTIER.

This is a perplexing case.

VIMONT.

It is perplexing to those only who wish to make it so.

LATOUR.

It is a most unusual case, and the means suggested for its settlement are of such a nature that we appeal to you—to both of you—if not to forget your differences, at least not to allow them to force you, and ourselves, into a position the consequences of which . . .

VIMONT.

I shirk none of the consequences. If the Marquis is disposed to do so, let him say so. [*He pauses and casts a searching look at* MIRVOISIN.] In which case we shall ascertain the source of all these objections, these pourparlers.

MIRVOISIN.

I shirk, or fear, none of the consequences. And I beg to inform you, sir, that I have not, as you have, attempted to influence the decision of the seconds. I placed my case in their hands, and there I have silently allowed it to remain.

[*The seconds confer.* VIMONT *paces the floor impatiently, stopping, for a moment, to whisper something to* BIRSON.]

CHARTIER.

[*Talking forcibly to his colleague.*] There is not, in my mind, sufficient cause for this duel.

VIMONT.

What! I spat in your principal's face and you do not deem that sufficient cause? Would you have me repeat the offense?

CHARTIER.

The original cause is the one I referred to.

VIMONT.

The secondary cause is the one I refer to.

CHARTIER.

Since you insist, we shall reluctantly perform the duty imposed upon us. Mirvoisin, are you ready?

MIRVOISIN.

[*Stepping forward briskly.*] Ready!

CHARTIER.

With what shall his wrists be tied?

BIRSON.

Here!

[*He draws from his pocket a large handkerchief and hands it to the seconds. One*

of VIMONT'S *seconds ties* MIRVOISIN'S *wrists tightly behind his back. All the seconds examine the knot carefully and nod approvingly. Then they measure the distance between the two walls, on either side of the room, moving the furniture for the purpose.*]

CHARTIER.

The central line shall be here. [*He places a handkerchief on the floor to indicate the spot.*] The outer lines shall be here [*touching the wall*], and there [*pointing to the wall on the opposite side, and which one of the seconds touches.*]

LATOUR.

Now, gentlemen, I appeal to you once more. Is there no possibility of reconciling your differences?

VIMONT.

None. Let the contest begin.

MIRVOISIN.

So say I.

CHARTIER.

It is understood, then, that you shall meet here [*pointing to the central line*], chest to chest—and that he who shall, twice out of three times, force his adversary to the outer line, shall be victor.

VIMONT.

It is so understood and agreed.

MIRVOISIN.

It is so understood and agreed.

CHARTIER.

What time shall be allowed to elapse between the contests?

VIMONT.

For my part, I say let them follow in quick succession.

MIRVOISIN.

In quick succession.

[*The two men meet on the line, chest to chest. The seconds take position to observe the contest. One of the latter puts the question,* Are you ready? *The principals respond in a firm voice,* Yes. *In deliberate tones one of the seconds counts,* One, two, three. *The struggle commences. With teeth set, the contestants strain every muscle to overcome each other. At first there is no perceptible advantage on either side; then, in turn, they gain on one another. Finally,* MIRVOISIN, *making a supreme effort, pushes* VIMONT, *with a rush, to the opposite wall. The seconds take note, while the two adversaries, looking fiercely at each other, resume their position at the central line. The question,* "Are you ready?" *is asked and responded to.* One, two, three. *The second contest commences. From the start* VIMONT *has the advantage. He is on the point of rushing* MIRVOISIN *to the wall, when the latter slips and falls to his knees.*]

VIMONT.

[*Turning excitedly to the seconds.*] I protest!

MIRVOISIN.

[*Rising.*] It was an accident—I swear!

VIMONT.

An accident which you can bring about whenever you are on the point of losing.

MIRVOISIN.

Since he doubts my statement, I give him the second contest.

VIMONT.

[*Indignantly.*] Give! You cannot give that which is not yours.

LATOUR.

The absurdity of the situation is obvious. The contest must end.

VIMONT.

It shall end at the conclusion of the third contest, not before.

MIRVOISIN.

Since he refuses to accept, as his, the second contest, let it be resumed here, where it was interrupted.

VIMONT.

Let it be resumed from the central line, where it originally started—but with the understanding that a fall is to be considered equivalent to defeat.

MIRVOISIN.

Agreed.

[*The two men face each other. They await the signal—but the seconds hesitate.*]

VIMONT.

We are waiting for the word.

LATOUR.

Gentlemen, we beg you—desist.

VIMONT.

If you will not give the word, we shall. [*He waits a minute, then turns fiercely to the seconds.*] Since when is it the duty of principals to call seconds to time?

LATOUR.

The entire situation is abnormal, and the proceedings irregular.

VIMONT.

Your presence here is evidence of your having accepted the situation. If you retract, we shall proceed without you. The question! [*He waits.*] The question! [*He waits.*] The question! [*He*

waits—the seconds are silent. He addresses MIRVOISIN.] Are you ready?

MIRVOISIN.

Ready!

VIMONT.

Birson—count three.

BIRSON.

One—two—three.

[*The second contest is resumed. It is a short, but sharp, struggle, resulting in* VIMONT *pushing* MIRVOISIN *to the wall. The two men face each other again. They wait.* VIMONT *looks inquiringly to the seconds. They are silent.*]

VIMONT.

[*Addressing* MIRVOISIN.] Are you ready?

MIRVOISIN.

Ready!

VIMONT.

Birson—count three.

BIRSON.

One—two—three.

[*The third struggle commences, more deter-*

mined, more prolonged than the previous ones. One has the advantage; then the other. Both come near being pushed to the wall, when a supreme effort saves them, and the contest is resumed near the central line. The seconds are carried away by excitement, and follow the contestants with vivid interest. BIRSON *looks on anxiously, swaying his body to and fro, as though his efforts could influence the issue. Finally* MIRVOISIN *takes a firm stand and, inch by inch, he pushes* VIMONT *to the wall. The latter, out of breath, walks up to* BIRSON.]

VIMONT.

The phial, Birson!

[MIRVOISIN *and the seconds step up briskly.*]

MIRVOISIN.

For my part, General, I cheerfully withdraw the conditions that were imposed. Nay, I beg of you, as a favor, not to insist on carrying them out.

VIMONT.

[*Haughtily.*] Thank you, sir, but I have no favors to ask at your hands; nor do I wish to receive any. Birson, the phial!

CHARTIER.

I beg of you, General, do not persist.

[*One of the seconds removes the handkerchief from* MIRVOISIN'S *wrists.*]

VIMONT.

Birson, the phial! [BIRSON *hesitates.*] Remember your promise. [BIRSON *opens the bag and produces the phial.*] Uncork it, Birson. [BIRSON, *his fingers on the cork, looks at* VIMONT *and still hesitates.*] Uncork it, I say; uncork it, if you be a man of your word. [BIRSON *uncorks the phial. The seconds rush between him and* VIMONT *and exclaim,* "We implore you, desist."—"What folly."—"It is a crime."—"It must not be." VIMONT *attempts to force his way to* BIRSON. *This scene must be full of action,* VIMONT *struggling against the four seconds, who wish to keep him from* BIRSON.] Fie on you! Fie! You cannot deter me with words. Break your compact if you will, I shall observe mine, to the letter. [*He makes another desperate effort to reach* BIRSON.] Stand back, I say! That man [*looking at* BIRSON] is bound to me by a solemn vow. Would you have him break his word? Would you have me despise him? Back —back! [*Again he tries to force his way to* BIRSON. *During the scrimmage which follows, a half-suppressed scream is heard, a portière is drawn aside, and* ALIXE *and* MADELEINE, *followed by the Abbot, appear on the scene.* MADELEINE, *frightened, partly clinging to the Abbot, remains at a distance from the group of men, while* ALIXE *rushes forth to her brother.* VIMONT *seems staggered for a moment. He draws himself away from* ALIXE. *He looks at her and then at* MADELEINE.] What are you doing here?

ALIXE.

I am here to stop the perpetration of a crime.

VIMONT.

You are here to try and stop the fulfillment of a sacred duty.

ALIXE.

Duty, I know, Eugene, is, from your standpoint, the carrying out of your word—given in excitement, under the influence of false impressions. But is there not a duty—a nobler, a higher, duty—which you owe to others? Forget me, if you will—me, who love you, look up to you, depend on you; but remember one other, one whose sentiments I make bold to voice when I say—what circumstances would otherwise forbid me saying—that you once led her to believe you loved her, and that she has vowed her life to you.

VIMONT.

[*Astonished.*] To whom do you refer? [ALIXE *turns towards* MADELEINE, *who stands silent, with hands clasped and head bowed low.*] Indeed you do make bold, for, unless I am grossly misinformed, the lady Madeleine is prepared to bestow on another that which you say she has vowed to me.

ALIXE.

On another! And pray, Eugene, to whom do you refer?

VIMONT.

[*Turning to* MIRVOISIN.] To this man.

MADELEINE.

[*Raising her head, with a look of surprise and indignation, moves towards* ALIXE *and takes her hand.*] Monsieur de Mirvoisin! Never did he utter a word of love to me, or cast a loving glance. More than this, I shall say—what circumstances would otherwise forbid me saying—that not only has Monsieur de Mirvoisin never sighed at my feet, but I know him to be the ever-constant lover of this fair lady [*looking at* ALIXE] and I know full well that he loves her not in vain.

VIMONT.

[*Perplexed.*] Is this some plot, some preconcerted action, to deter me from my resolve?

ABBOT.

[*Stepping forward.*] I betray no secret of the confessional when I confirm as facts what these ladies have here related.

ALIXE.

[*Still holding* MADELEINE'S *hand, advances towards* VIMONT.] Men swear on their honor, as gentlemen. Permit us, then, to swear on *our* honor—not a whit less sacred to us than theirs—as gentlewomen, that what we say is true.

MADELEINE.

And believe us—since we are women, and have said and done what woman's nature forbids her saying and doing—that our words and actions, which you have just heard and witnessed, sprang not from desire on our part, but from circumstances which we pray may be spared to others of our sex. Otherwise, silence would have chained our tongue, and our love died rather than betray itself.

VIMONT.

[*Looking intently at* ALIXE *and* MADELEINE, *as though to read their thoughts, and then turning to* BIRSON.] How is this, Birson? This tale does not correspond with yours. [BIRSON *hangs his head and is silent.* VIMONT *turns to* MIRVOISIN.] Did you, or did you not, refer to me in insulting terms?

MIRVOISIN.

No words concerning you ever escaped my lips, save words of praise. No thoughts ever dwelt in my mind, save thoughts of kindness. Wishing, above all else, to win your fair sister's hand, how could I have ventured to offend him from whom I was to ask that hand?

VIMONT.

I take your word for it—[*he pauses*]—and crave your forgiveness. I cannot offer you my hand, but [*facing* ALIXE] take hers—'tis yours.

[MIRVOISIN *takes* ALIXE'S *hand.*] Love her, be kind to her—'tis all I ask. [*Turning to* BIRSON.] Birson, for reasons you well understand, I took you, a penniless wanderer, to my home. I gave you shelter, I gave you my confidence, I had reason to hope . . . Quick! quick! [*The seconds rush forward and take from* BIRSON *the phial of poison which he is about to bring to his lips.*] No, Birson, live—live, but go elsewhere if you would find victims for your vile deceit. It will prove less offensive if practiced on those to whom you do not owe a debt of gratitude.

[BIRSON, *with bowed head, is about to withdraw, when* MADAME *and* MADEMOISELLE DE LA MARTHE *enter. They salute the company, who salute in turn. During this scene,* ALIXE *and* MADELEINE *are conversing, holding each other's hand, while* VIMONT *and* MIRVOISIN *are talking earnestly, in low tones.*]

MDLLE. DE LA MARTHE.

[*Addressing* BIRSON.] We have been seeking you everywhere.

MADAME DE LA MARTHE.

[*Taking* BIRSON *aside and followed by* MADEMOISELLE DE LA MARTHE.] A letter received this morning announces more family news of importance.

MDLLE. DE LA MARTHE.

Our cousin Antoinette is to marry Monsieur de Bastiac.

MADAME DE LA MARTHE.

[*Solemnly.*] How true the family tradition! Only four days have elapsed, and already the second engagement is announced.

MDLLE. DE LA MARTHE.

[*To* BIRSON. *Maliciously.*] That kills your chance.

BIRSON.

[*With greater evidence of malice.*] Yours likewise.

MADAME and MDLLE. DE LA MARTHE.

How so? How so?

BIRSON.

The third engagement is announced.

MADAME and MDLLE. DE LA MARTHE.

[*Eagerly.*] Whose? Whose?

BIRSON.

Our nephew de Mirvoisin is engaged to Mademoiselle Vimont.

[*Consternation of the two ladies, who withdraw to a corner, followed by* BIRSON. VIMONT *and* MIRVOISIN *join* ALIXE *and* MADELEINE.]

ALIXE.

Did I not tell you, Eugene, that, if you tried, you should find something nobler than war, sweeter than renown—something that would awaken a new ambition?

VIMONT.

[*Looking at* ALIXE, *then at* MADELEINE, *whom he approaches.*] Yes, fair sister, I have indeed found both the incentive to, and the reward of, true ambition.

MIRVOISIN.

[*Smilingly.*] Mars disarmed . . .

ABBOT.

Laus Deo semper!

THE END.

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